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ÆSCHYLUS.





# ÆSCHYLUS

IN ENGLISH VERSE.

PART III. ✓

AGAMEMNON. *Libation for the*

CHOËPHOROE, OR ~~THE~~ MOURNERS.

EUMENIDES, OR THE RECONCILIATION. *Twice*

BY

ARTHUR S. WAY, D.LIT.

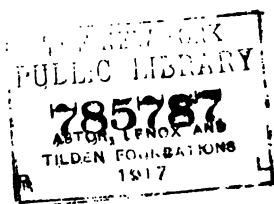
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V. 104

—

AGAMEMNON.



## ARGUMENT.

*FOR three generations the House of Atreus lay under a curse, the Curse of Kindred Blood. For when Atreus was king of Mycenæ, Thyestes, his brother, corrupted the king's wife, and with her plotted Atreus' ruin. So Atreus sought to slay him, and he fled from the land. But when after many days Thyestes returned, Atreus feigned to be reconciled to him, and bade him to a feast. But therein he had the flesh of Thyestes' own children set before their father, who unwittingly ate thereof. He, when he knew the truth, called down upon Atreus' house this curse, that kindred should still slay kindred to the third generation. And it came to pass that when Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, was made captain of the host of Greece which was to sail against Troy, he provoked the wrath of Artemis, and the goddess held the fleet wind-bound at Aulis, till he made atonement by sacrificing his own daughter, Iphigeneia. For this cause his wife Klytemnestra hated him, and conspired with Ægisthus, Thyestes' son, with whom she lived in adultery, to destroy him when he should come home from the war. So they prepared beacons upon the mountains between Troy and Greece, and set a watchman to watch for the first token that these should give of the fall of Troy.*

*And herein is told how Agamemnon came home from the war, and by what means his wife compassed his murder.*

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

AGAMEMNON, *King of Mycenæ.*

KLYTEMNESTRA, *wife to Agamemnon.*

KASSANDRA, *a prophetess, Daughter of Priam, King of  
Troy, and captive of Agamemnon.*

ÆGISTHUS, *son of Thyestes, co-plotter with Klytem-  
nestra.*

WATCHMAN.

HERALD.

CHORUS, *consisting of Elders of Mycenæ.*

SCENE :—In front of the palace of Agamemnon.

## AGAMEMNON.

*(A Watchman is couched on the palace-roof, gazing northward through the darkness before the dawn.)*

### WATCHMAN.

I PRAY the Gods for riddance from these toils,  
The long lapse of this watch of years, wherein  
Couched doglike, elbow-propped, on the Atreids' roof,  
I have learnt by heart the muster of night's stars,  
Yea, those which bring men winter and summer-tide,  
Bright potentates throned in the firmament  
As stars—their settings and their risings know.  
Now watch I for the token of the torch,  
The splendour of fire that brings us word from Troy,  
Brings tidings of her fall: for so constrains 10  
Yon woman's heart man-mettled, aye expectant.  
When on this couch night-wildered, dew-bedrenched,  
I lie, a couch not visited of dreams,—  
For Fear in Sleep's stead is my chamberlain,  
That unafraid I cannot close mine eyes,—  
Then, when I think to sing or hum a stave,  
As who should shred him sleep-dispelling herbs,  
Then weep I, and bemoan this house's plight,  
Its foul misrule, far other than of old.



Now come with blessing, O release from toil, 20  
 Fire of glad tidings flashing through the gloom !  
*(A beacon-light gleams out on the northern sky-line.)*  
 Hail, torch of night, who tossest high a gleam  
 As dayspring fair, that meaneth many a dance  
 Arrayed in Argos, for this triumph's sake !  
 What ho ! what ho !  
 Lo, I will certify Agamemnon's wife.  
 So from her couch leaping in haste shall she  
 Shrill forth a shout in welcome to yon torch—  
 If Ilium-town have fallen in very deed  
 As yonder herald-beacon manifests. 30  
 Myself will dance the prelude thereunto ;  
 For I will count my lord's good-hap mine own—  
 The thrice-six<sup>1</sup> cast me by the beacon-blaze.  
 Ah, be it mine to upbear with this my hand  
 My lord's dear hand when he returneth home !  
 No more—upon my tongue treads heavily  
*The ox.*<sup>2</sup> The house's self, could it find voice  
 Would cry too plainly. I to such as know  
 Speak, nothing loth : for others—I forget.

[*Exit.*

*Enter Chorus.*

CHORUS.

This is the tenth of the years since to plead at the  
 War-god's bar 40  
 Rose in his might against Priam the king Menelaus :  
 to war

1. The luckiest possible throw when playing, as was usual, with three dice.

2. A rustic metaphor, equivalent to 'my lips are sealed.'

Went Agamemnon beside him : of Zeus were their  
 thrones, even twain ;  
 Twain were their sceptres of royalty : like unto steeds  
 that strain  
 Under one yoke were Atreides' sons : from our land  
 led they  
 Galleys a thousand that wafted to aid them a warrior-  
 array,  
 Shouting the fury of fight from their souls : it was  
 fierce as the sound  
 Ringing through desolate places when vultures are  
 wheeling round  
 High o'er their eyry in anguish for nestlings afar from  
 it torn, 50  
 Heavily beating like oars the broad pinions whereon  
 they are borne,  
 Hungry for tendance of nurslings whereof they are left  
 forlorn—  
 Yet not alone ; for Apollo or Zeus or the Wildwood-king,  
 Hearing the wail of the aliens that lodge in their city  
 upring,  
 Haply a lingering vengeance, yet sure, on the spoilers  
 shall bring.  
 So hath a mightier Zeus, the Warder of Strangers,  
 sped 60  
 Atreus' sons, for her sake whom full many a man  
 would have wed,  
 Hard on the track of the prince Alexander, ordaining  
 for these  
 Many a desperate grapple where fainted men's  
 strength, and their knees  
 Bowed, and were dashed in the dust, and the shafts  
 of the war-spears crashed

Splintered in twain, where the battle-fronts Trojan  
and Danaan clashed.

Now is the end—as *it is* ; and the doom foreordained  
is fulfilled.

Never by secret burnt-sacrifice, not by drink-offerings  
spilled,

Neither by tears, shall the Wrath for the rites desecrated  
be stilled. 70

We, whom the eld-withered frame made of little  
account, when went

Over the sea battle-helpers, abide ; for our strength  
forspent,

Frail as the strength of a babe, o'er the staff bowed,  
wearily creeps ;—

Yea, for the blood of the child, in the tender bosom  
that leaps,

Strengthless as eld is at first : the War-god therein  
hath no place :

So, when its leafage is sere, totters eld on its three-  
footed ways, 80

Nowise more strong than a child, as a dream—as a  
daydream, it strays.

But thou, O Klytemnestra, Argos' Queen,

Tyndareus' child, what is to do ?

What hath befallen ? What hast heard or seen ?

What tidings have won through,

That thy commandment all the city round

Bids sacrifice ? The Gods that sway

Yon burg—the Gods on high, beneath the ground—

Heaven-dwelling Ones, and they

That rule the mart—lo, all their altars blaze 90  
 With gifts thereon: to left, to right  
 The flaming offerings high as heaven upraise  
 Thanksgiving-hands of light,

Whereto the soft, the uncontaminate  
 Suasion of oil is ministering,  
 Of that pure chrism from the inviolate  
 Hid treasury of the King.

Tell us hereof whate'er thou canst declare,  
 Whose utterance crosses not Heaven's will ;  
 So bring assuaging of this fever of care  
 That darkly now bodes ill, 100

And now, at sight of yonder sacrifice,  
 Hope's radiant smile thrusts back again  
 Relentless fear, whose nightmare burden lies  
 On hearts deep-gnawed by pain.

(Str. 1)

It is mine to chant the victory fated,  
 And the omen that came in the wayfaring  
 Of the mighty heroes; for unabated  
 By years is the God's inspiration, and mated  
 Therewith is the trust in whose strength I sing.  
 I sing how the vehement eagle-omen  
 Sped onward with spear and avenging hand  
 Achaia's twin-throned lords on the foemen,  
 Sped the one-souled chiefs of the stalwart yeomen 110  
 Of Hellas against the Teukrian land ;  
 How the kings of the birds to the kings of the  
 galleys—

One erne black, one with the tail white-gleaming—  
 Appeared on the spear-hand hard by the palace

On a spot set clear for all men's discerning,  
 Rending a hare with her brood yet teeming,  
 Which was stopped in her last swift frenzied turning.  
*Woe's me and alas for doom's hid net !* [120  
*Yet oh, may the Right be triumphant yet !*

(*Ant. 1*)

Then looked on the warrior Atreids, heeding  
 Their diverse natures with clear calm eye,  
 The seer of the host, and the ravin-feeding  
 Eagles he knew for the captains leading  
 The host ; and in vision thus did he cry :  
 ' By them that on this war-path have wended  
 Shall the city of Priam be taken at last,  
 And all the wealth that her towers defended  
 For enriching of them that her cause befriended  
 Shall Doom with ravaging hands lay waste. 130  
 Yet the battle-curb of the guilty city—  
 Be it not overclouded, untimely stricken  
 By wrath divine ; for with jealous pity  
 For that wretched hare, looked Artemis lowering  
 On her Sire's winged hounds, that, ere life might  
 quicken  
 To the birth, were mother and brood devouring '—  
*Woe's me and alas for doom's hid net !*  
*Yet oh, may the Right be triumphant yet !*

(*Mesode.*)

' So gracious of heart is the Fair of Face 140  
 To the strengthless cubs—soft dewdrop-things—  
 Of ravening lions, and loveth well  
 The tender younglings that crave the udder  
 Of all the children of field and fell :  
 Therefore she saith, " Zeus, do me a grace :  
 Avenge me of these my fosterlings ! "

Yon eagle-omen in part then brings  
 Good—yet hath it somewhat whereat I shudder.  
 To Apollo the Healer-god I cry;  
 I beseech him to plead with the Huntress, that she  
 Send no blasts breathing adversely  
 To cause the Danaan galleys to lie 150  
 Harbour-bound while the months go by,  
 To force them to offer a sacrifice dread,  
 Strange, lawless, whereof no feast is spread,  
 The seed of a feud that shall cleave to the house,  
 That begetteth rebellion against a spouse:  
 For therein doth a haunting curse remain,  
 The treacherous wrath that forgetteth never,  
 Though in seeming suppressed, re-arising ever,  
 Set on revenge for the child that was slain.  
 Such doom, albeit with blessings blent,  
 Did Kalchas' voice shriek forth to the kings  
 From the omen seen in the way as they went,  
 And my voice with the boding in consonance rings—  
*Woe's me and alas for doom's hid net!*  
*Yet oh, may the Right be triumphant yet!*

(Str. 2)

Zeus—whate'er 'Zeus' expresseth of His essence—  
 If the name please him on the lips of prayer, [160  
 With this name on my lips I seek his presence,  
 Knowing none else I may with him compare.  
 Yea, though I ponder, in the balance laying  
 All else, no help save Zeus alone I find,  
 If I would cast aside the burden weighing,  
 All to no profit, ever on my mind.

(Ant. 2)

He that erstwhile was lord of all created,  
 Set in resistless battle-might on high,

Now shall none name him, the oblivion-fated,  
✓ Seeing his day is utterly gone by. 170

Yea, his successor, from the empyrean  
Hurled by a mightier wrestler, is no more :  
But whoso chanteth Zeus's triumph-pæan  
Loyally, he shall gain all wisdom's store.  
(Str. 3)


Zeus unto men the path of wisdom showeth :  
This as the law of life doth he ordain—  
' From suffering's root the flower instruction groweth.'  
Yet even in sleep the heart sees only pain

Dropping from memory's winepress : still is given  
Wisdom to scholars loth to understand : 180  
The Gods from thrones of majesty in heaven  
Must force their boon into the unwilling hand.  
(Ant. 3)

So was it then : that elder squadron-leader  
Blamed not the prophet's counsel of despair,  
All helmless driven by Fate the tempest-speeder,  
What time in evil case the Achaians were,

Camped idly on the shore toward Chalkis facing,  
Whence none could sail, a-hungered, thirst-dis-  
tressed,  
There where the tides this way and that way racing 190  
Past Aulis' mountain-haven, know no rest.  
(Str. 4)

Blasts from the bitter north blew ever, bearing  
Deadly delay and famine in their train,  
Havenless wanderings to and fro ; unsparing  
They battered hulls, and hawsers snapped in twain ;



They made the long days longer : heavy-wearing  
 Hours cankered Argos' flower with idleness :—  
 When lo, a prophet-voice pealed out, declaring  
 A cure worse than the bitter weather's stress : 200

Prophet to king spake, challenging defiance  
 Of Artemis' decree : then horror-thrilled,  
 Dashed to the ground their sceptres Atreus' scions,  
 And with indignant tears their eyes were filled.

(*Ant.* 4)

In dark despair the elder King spake, crying,  
 ' Woe to me if I do not her command !  
 Yet oh, to see mine house's darling lying  
 Upon the altar, and upon mine hand  
 The life-streams of a slaughtered maiden dyeing 210  
 A father's fingers !—wretched choice for me !  
 Yet—how forsake the ships, like recreant flying ?  
 How forfeit all this great confederacy ?

None may blame these whose clamour fury-laden  
 Demands a sacrifice to lull to rest  
 The winds, though nought save slaughter of a maiden  
 Avail—ah me ! may all be for the best !'

(*Str.* 5)

So he stooped 'neath the yoke of fate's compulsion ;  
 And the godless blast of a spirit's revulsion  
 Swept through him, unclean, unhallowed, turning 220  
 His soul to a purpose of reckless daring :—  
 Oh hideous wellspring of woes, the uncaring  
 Frenzy that trampleth on honour, the burning  
 Passion that steels hearts ! Thus the severance  
 Of the fetter that trammelled the fleet, the deliverance  
 Of a wanton was he by his child's blood earning !



(Ant. 5)

And the child-voice crying 'O father !' and pleading  
Those battle-fain deemsters heard unheeding; 230

But her father, so soon as the prayer had been  
chanted,

Bade the ministers raise her—yea, bade none falter—  
Like a kid, all drooping, above the altar

Close-swathed in her vesture; and, even as panted  
Her lovely lips with the words outrushing,

Bade stay with the curb's might utterance-crushing  
The curse, lest his house thereby should be haunted.

(Str. 6)

And, with saffron-dyed robes to the earth down-stream-  
ing,

Each death-priest she smote with the shaft pity-  
gleaming 240

Of her glance—as a picture with eyes imploring  
That seemeth in act to speak—to soften

Those hearts of stone! Ah, often and often

Had her sire's halls thrilled to the glad outpouring  
Of her song by the tables banquet-laden,  
When the wine-drops were spilled, and the pure-  
voiced maiden

Called down Heaven's blessing in chants adoring.

(Ant. 6)

And then—O, I saw not, I tell not! Fair issue  
Had Kalchas' devisings! The fateful tissue

Of instruction from Justice's loom down-sweepeth  
On such as have suffered:—but what is her dooming  
Suffice it to know in the day of its coming. [250

Who knoweth beforehand, beforehand weepeth.  
With the dawn's forthshining shall come revelation.

That the end may be well is the supplication  
Of the near one, the dear one, who this land keepeth.

*Enter Klytemnestra.*

Queen, reverencing thy majesty I come ;  
For meet it is to honour the King's wife,  
When of its lord the throne stands tenantless.     260  
But whether for good tidings heard or no  
With hopes that herald joy thou sacrifice  
Fain would I hear, yet grudge not reticence.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

' With heralding of good,' as saith the saw,  
' Forth let the Dawn break from her mother Night.'  
A joy beyond hope's vision shalt thou learn :  
For Priam's city have the Argives ta'en.

CHORUS.

What said'st thou ?—through unfaith it 'scaped my  
ear.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

The Achaians hold Troy : speak I clearly now ?

CHORUS.

Joy thrills me, crying challenge to my tears !     270

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Thy loyalty in thy visage stands confest.

CHORUS.

Now hast thou token sure thereof ?—and what ?

KLYTEMNESTRA.

I have—how not ?—except a god delude.

CHORUS.

Dost thou lend easy credence to dream-shows ?

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Not for me fantasies of slumbering sense !

CHORUS.

Hath then some wingless rumour gladdened thee ?

KLYTEMNESTRA.

As some young girl's hast thou misprized my wit !

CHORUS.

How long time is it since the city fell ?

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Even in the night that gave this dayspring birth.

CHORUS.

What messenger to such speed could attain ?      280

KLYTEMNESTRA.

The Fire-god :—he from Ida splendour hurled.  
Beacon to beacon flung the courier-flame  
Hitherward. Ida gleamed to Hermes' crag  
In Lemnos. From the isle that giant torch  
Did Athos third, the scour of Zeus, receive.  
Soaring o'er flame-lit ridges of the sea  
That torch triumphant journeying in his strength,  
The pine's gold-gleaming splendour, like a sun,  
Passed to Makistus' heights its message on :  
Nor loitering he, nor heedless, as by sleep      290  
O'ermastered, failed his part in heralding :  
But o'er Euripus' flood the beacon-gleam  
Far-flying brought Messapius' watchmen word.

They flashed back answer, sped the tidings on,  
 Touching with fire a heath-pile sapless-old.  
 The Titan torch in yet unminished might  
 High leaping o'er Asopus' plain—it seemed  
 A bright moon rising—to Kithairon's crag,  
 Uproused a new relay of courier-fire.  
 And there the watch disowned it not, the light 300  
 Far sent, but lit a huger bale than all.  
 And the glare darted o'er Gorgopis' mere,  
 And, winning unto Aigioplanktos' hill,  
 Bade, 'Stint not ye the ordinance of fire !'  
 Uptossed they, kindled in unscanted might,  
 A giant beard of flame that glaring soared  
 Over the foreland that on Saron's firth  
 Looks : down it lightened then, until it won  
 Arachné's watchtower-steeps hard by our town.  
 Thence to the Atreids' palace down it flashed, 310  
 This far-descended child of Ida's fire.  
 Thus they which ran my torch-race by such rule,  
 Hand passing it on to hand, fulfilled their course ;  
 Victor the first is, though he raceth last.  
 Such sign, such token, tell I unto thee  
 Of tidings sent me by my lord from Troy.

CHORUS.

Hereafter will I thank the Gods, O Queen :  
 Now would I fain hear once again throughout,  
 And marvel at the story thou dost tell.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Masters of Troy this day the Achaians are. 320  
 Discordant cries, I ween, are loud therein.  
 Pour into one bowl vinegar and oil—

These shalt thou name antagonists, not friends ;  
 So from the vanquished and the victors now  
 Are diverse cries heard, born of diverse plight.  
 These, fallen on the bodies of their slain—  
 On husband, brother, yea, on grey-haired sire  
 The children—o'er the doom of dear, dear dead,  
 With lips that now are slaves' lips wail aloud.  
 Those—toil of vigil and fight constraineth them 330  
 Famished to break their fast on what the town  
 Hath ready, in no order billeted :  
 But, even as each hath drawn the lot of chance,  
 In Trojan mansions, now the spoil of spears,  
 They lodge this day, escaped the frosts and dews  
 Of naked skies, and careless as the Gods  
 Shall sleep the livelong night unsentinelled.  
 If these respect the Gods that in the land  
 Made captive dwell, and temples of the Gods,  
 The smiters shall not in their turn be smitten. 340  
 But may no lust of greed upon the host  
 Descend, for rapine of forefended things.  
 For yet remains their half-race, even to run  
 The backward course in scatheless home-return.  
 Yea, though in heaven's sight guiltless fare the host  
 Homeward, for slaughtered victims vengeance still  
 Might wake—ay, though no sudden ills befall.  
 Lo, this thou hear'st from mine, a woman's mouth.  
 Now, in no doubtful balance, triumph the right !  
 This boon above all blessings do I choose. 350

## CHORUS.

Queen, like a wise man's, gracious is thy speech.  
 I, hearing the sure token named of thee,

Address me to thanksgiving to the Gods.  
For priceless meed of labour hath been won.

[*Exit Klytemnestra.*]

Hail to thee, Zeus, O King! Hail, night of joy,  
Winner for us of glory, who hast flung  
A net close-trammelling o'er the towers of Troy!  
Ha, none may overleap, nor old nor young,  
Ruin's all-snaring coil that makes them thralldom's  
    spoil, [360  
Whose mighty meshes round their lives have clung!

Worship and thanks to Zeus who wards the right  
Of host and guest! On Paris did he strain  
Long since his bow, that his true shaft might light  
Not ere the appointed hour, nor waste its flight  
In voids beyond the stars, sped all in vain.

(*Str. 1*)

They have for their transgression's meed  
The stroke of Zeus: his hand herein  
All men may trace: who wrought the sin  
Have suffered as He hath decreed.

Who dares aver the Gods reck nought 370  
Of human actions when man flings  
The sanctity of holy things  
Beneath his feet?—an impious thought!

Now stands revealed the vengeance reaped  
When bold presumption, in despite  
Of Justice, breathes the rage of fight  
In pride of wealth by wrong upheaped.

But O, be mine a lot kept free  
From suffering: mine be feet that pace

Paths that the steps of wisdom trace :  
So shall content companion me. 380

For riches shall be no defence  
Unto the man who from his sight  
Spurns the great altar of the Right  
In pride of full-fed insolence. (Ant. 1)

Yet is man haled as with a chain,  
By scheming Ruin's resistless child,  
Temptation, into sin beguiled.  
What cure avails?—all, all are vain !

Not hidden is the mischief: nay,  
The gleam thereof glares lurid-dyed,  
And, like bronze tempered ill, when tried 390  
By touchstone-rasp and blows' assay,

So shows the sinner black in grain.  
He chases, like some child, the wings  
Elusive of a bird, and brings  
Upon his country hopeless bane ;

And no God heareth when he prays :  
Nay, but the very God to whom  
He kneeleth, spurns him to his doom  
Who walketh in injustice' ways.

Even such was Paris: to the home 400  
Of Atreus' royal sons he came,  
And heaped on that guest-table shame,  
In that he stole the wife therefrom.

(Str. 2)  
And she left to her people the spear-clang ringing  
On shields, and the arming of war-hosts sent

Overseas ; and to Ilium for dowry bringing  
 Ruin, through those gates swiftly she went :—  
 Such a horror shedared ! And, with groans proclaiming  
 Their grief, did the seers of her house lament :  
 ‘ Woe for the home, for the rulers’ shaming,      410  
 For Love’s lost footprints, his bow unbent ! ’  
 But he—he is silent, is unreviling,  
 Though the world hath beheld him the scorned, the  
 forsaken :

Overseas is his heart ; and a phantom, beguiling  
 His spirit, her place in his palace hath taken :  
 And statues of loveliest mould may waken  
 Loathing alone ; in his famishing eyes  
 Each spell of the Love-queen shattered lies.

(*Ant.* 2)

Vain joys in slumber a ravishing vision      420  
 Brings to the heart that doth wake and weep.  
 He seeth in fancy a rapture Elysian,  
 And his arms enclasp it, but may not keep.  
 Vanished the vision is, unreturning,  
 On wings that follow the paths of sleep.  
 In such anguished bereavement that house is yearning :  
 Yea, and bitterer harvest than this shall it reap.  
 And all through Hellas for heroes departed  
 Love widowed, love orphaned, in desolate places  
 Is waiting, unknowing and patient-hearted :      430  
 Yet shall anguish of mockery fill their embraces ;  
 For, instead of the unforgotten faces  
 Of the heroes they dream of, to each man’s home  
 Armour and ashes—nought else—shall come.

(*Str.* 3)

The War-god, who exchangeth  
 Men’s lives for gold,



And, where the mad spear rangeth,  
The scales doth hold,  
Sends back to hearts that yearn  
For a brave man's return, 440  
Filling one small sad urn  
Pyre-ashes cold.

With sighs love tells their story :—  
In battle bold  
Was one : one fell with glory  
With garments rolled  
In blood :—and each man died  
All for another's bride !  
In whispered pain and pride  
Is the tale told.

While here grief's hushed defiance 450  
Chides bitter-souled  
Atreus' avenging scions,  
There, lapped in mould,  
They, round the embattled steep,  
In death yet comely, sleep ;  
The land they won—and keep—  
Doth these enfold.

(*Ant.* 3)

A people's execration  
Speaks stern and low,  
As when an outraged nation  
Curses her foe.  
Ah me ! mine heart is fain  
For what comes in night's train ! 460  
Slayers of many slain  
Gods watch, I trow.

Unrighteous gain but tendeth  
 To overthrow.  
 The dark Erinnys endeth  
 All at one blow :  
 Then is the proud down thrust  
 To darkness and to dust,  
 There where the strengthless must  
 All hope forego.

Fame above measure given  
 Brings man but woe :  
 Full in his eyes Zeus' levin  
 Flasheth its glow. 470  
 Let mine unenvied weal  
 Nor crush with armèd heel  
 Cities, nor conquest feel,  
 Nor thraldom know.

Tidings on flaming wings of triumph flew,  
 And swift through Argos goes  
 The rumour of it : yet if all be true,  
 Or if 'tis some heaven-sent delusion—who,  
 Ah me, who knows ?  
 Who is so babe-like, who in wit so maimed,  
 That all his heart should glow 480  
 At beacon-fires that forth their message flamed,  
 Then, when the tale is changed, downcast and shamed,  
 Should be brought low ?  
 How like the woman's spirit, to be crying  
 'Hail ! ' to a boon, ere proof appear,  
 With eager credence past all bounds swift-flying !  
 Ah, but the rumour woman-vouched swift-dying  
 Fails from the cheated ear.

Soon shall we prove the faith of cresset-glare  
 And beacon, and the swift relays of fire, 490  
 If true they were, or whether, false as dreams,  
 That welcome light came but to cheat our hearts.  
 Lo, from the beach a herald comes, his brows  
 Wreathed with the olive-sprays. Yon dust he bears,  
 Twin-sister of the mire, my witness is  
 That no dumb tongue—not like thy kindled flame  
 Of mountain-logs, and smoke—shall now tell all :  
 But, either words shall fuller joy proclaim,  
 Or—out upon aught that contraveneth this !  
 Come sequel glad to that glad vision seen ! 500  
 Whoso for this land prayeth otherwise,  
 His harvest be the sin of his own soul !

*Enter Herald.*

HERALD.

All hail, ancestral soil of Argive land !  
 As dawns the tenth year unto thee I come.  
 This one of many wrecked hopes wins to port.  
 Never I trusted even here to die  
 And share a dear grave in the Argive land.  
 All hail, O land ! light of the sun, all hail !  
 Hail, Zeus high-throned o'er Argos ! Pythian King,  
 Thy bow upon us rain its shafts no more ! 510  
 Suffice that vengeance by Skamander-stream :  
 Now turn thou, Saviour be, be Healer, King  
 Apollo ! To all Gods of Festival  
 I cry, and to my champion Hermes cry,  
 Dear Herald-god, of heralds aye adored.  
 Heroes, who sped us forth, O welcome home  
 Graciously us, the remnant 'scaped the spear !

Hail, halls of kings, hail, roof-tree well-beloved,  
 Hail, shrines revered, and Gods that take the morning !  
 If ever of old, so now, with love-lit eyes 520  
 With honour greet our King who comes so late.  
 For bringing light in darkness is he come  
 To you and all these—Agamemnon King !  
 O greet him well—'tis seemly so to do—  
 Who with the mattock of avenging Zeus  
 Hath dug down Troy, hath ploughed up all her plain.  
 Vanished her altars are, her fanes of Gods ;  
 All the land's seed hath perished utterly.  
 Such yoke upon the neck of Troy was cast  
 By Atreus' elder son, the King, who comes 530  
 Heaven-blest, most worship-worthy of living men ;  
 Since Paris nor his crime-abettor, Troy,  
 Can boast the penalty matched not the deed.  
 He, of abduction and of theft convict,  
 Forfeit hath paid, hath mown in ruin down  
 His father's house, his fatherland withal.  
 Twofold hath Priam's line for trespass paid.

CHORUS.

Glad greeting, herald from Achaia's host !

HERALD.

Glad ?—though I died now, I would murmur not !

CHORUS.

Did love of home so wrestle with thine heart ? 540

HERALD.

So much, mine eyes are dim with happy tears.

CHORUS.

Some sweetness was there in your heart-ache, then.

HERALD.

How?—teach me, so that I may grasp thy drift.

CHORUS.

Hearts yearned at home for you who yearned for them.

HERALD.

Ha! the land sickened for her homesick host?

CHORUS.

Ay, from a darkened spirit oft I groaned.

HERALD.

Why brooded o'er your hearts this dire despair?

CHORUS.

Silence, long since I proved, is wrong's one salve.

HERALD.

Afraid wast thou—of whom, thy King afar?

CHORUS.

Ay,—as thou saidst, content I now would die. 550

HERALD.

Yea, all is well. Yet, in that weary time,  
Albeit I could tell of much fair speed,  
Some hardships vexed us:—who, except the Gods,  
Lives sorrowless in all things evermore?  
Of travail might I tell, bleak bivouac,  
Of iron-bound coasts, hard lying, groans on groans—  
Who knows how many?—through the straitened days.  
Then came new ills on land to vex us more:  
Hard by our foes' walls through the nights we lay;  
And dews from heaven, and reek of marshy mead 560

Down drizzled, clammy-cleaving, rotting vest,  
And making man's hair like a wild beast's fell.  
But O to tell of winters that slew birds,  
By snows of Ida made intolerable,  
Of heats, when on his midnoon couch the sea  
Unrippled sank and slept, and no breath stirred !  
What boots to grieve o'er these ? Our toils are past—  
Ay, from our dead hath utterly past away  
All care, though it were but to rise again !  
Why of those wasted lives take nice account ? 570  
Why need the living grieve for adverse fate ?  
I to disaster bid a long farewell.  
For us, the remnant of the Argive host,  
The gain outweighs, the suffering strikes the beam ;  
So that we well may boast to yonder sun,  
As over sea and over land we fleet—  
' The Argive army, conquerors of Troy,  
Hang up these spoils, a glory to their Gods,  
In ancient sanctuaries all Hellas through.'  
Now that ye hear this, Argos and her chiefs 580  
Ought ye to praise. The grace of Zeus, which wrought  
This, shall have honour. Thou hast all my tale.

## CHORUS.

Thou hast routed my misgivings ; this I own.  
'Tis ne'er too late for old men to learn good.  
Yet this, as meet is, toucheth most the Queen  
And the House Royal : I too am rich therein.

*Enter Klytemnestra.*

## KLYTEMNESTRA.

Erewhile I raised the jubilation-shout  
When came the first night-messenger of fire

Telling Troy's capture and her overthrow.  
 And one spake chiding, ' Unto beacon-tenders      590  
 Givest thou credence, to think Troy is sacked?  
 True woman thou, whose heart for such cause leaps !'  
 So was I made to seem delusion's fool.  
 Yet sacrificed I : by thy queen's decree  
 One from another caught up jubilant cries  
 Through Argos, while in temples of the Gods  
 They lulled with wine the odorous incense-flame.  
 And now, what need that more thou tell to me ?  
 Of my lord's self will I learn all the tale.  
 Haste will I now, with honour to receive      600  
 My lord revered at his home-coming. What  
 Can dawn with sweeter light to wife than this  
 The day she flings wide doors to her lord brought safe  
 By God from war ? Thou tell mine husband this,  
 To come with all speed, come, the land's desire—  
 To come and find a leal wife in his halls,  
 Even as he left her, as a watch-dog staunch  
 To guard his home, a foe unto his foes,  
 And in all else the same, who of his seals  
 Have broken not one all this weary while.      610  
 Pleasure with man beside, or rumoured shame  
 No more I know than—how to dye a sword.

[Exit.

HERALD.

Such protest proud, with truth fraught, misbeseems  
 No high-born lady's lips to utter forth.

CHORUS.

So hath she spoken, so thou hear'st a tale  
 Fair-seeming—to clear-eyed interpreters.

Speak, herald—I of Menelaus ask :  
Hath he, from perils safe brought back, returned,  
And come with you, this land's belovèd prince ?

HERALD.

I cannot tell things false and fair to hear, 620  
So that my friends should long reap fruit of joy.

CHORUS.

Would God thou couldst both tell good news and true !  
'Tis all too plain that they be severed here.

HERALD.

Lost is the hero from Achaia's host,  
He and his galley : truth is this I tell.

CHORUS.

Lost?—when in sight of friends he sailed from Troy?—  
Or swept away by a storm that vexed ye all ?

HERALD.

Like perfect archer hast thou hit the mark,  
And long calamity hast summed in brief.

CHORUS.

Hath rumour come from any mariners 630  
Beside, that speaks him living yet or dead ?

HERALD.

None knoweth, to give clear report thereof,  
Except the sun, who fostereth all the earth.

CHORUS.

How, say'st thou, came that tempest on the host,  
By the Gods' anger, and how ended it ?



## HERALD.

With an ill tale to mar thanksgiving's day  
Fits not. Heaven's praise should rest inviolate.  
Now when with clouded brow a herald brings  
Hideous disaster from a field of rout,  
And speaks a nation stricken with one wound, 640  
Speaks many a light of many a home doom-banned  
By Arês' twy-lashed scourge of fire and steel—  
Twin slaughter-curse, blood-boultered chariot-pair,—  
Yea, when one cometh burdened with such woes,  
Well may he chant such pæan-hymn of fiends.  
But when a herald of deliverance  
Comes to a town exulting in her weal—  
How shall I mingle good with evil, tell  
Of storm that spake to Greeks the wrath of Gods?  
For they which heretofore were utter foes, 650  
Even Fire and Sea, conspired and plighted faith  
For havoc of the Argives' hapless host.  
One night a ruin of stormy billows surged :  
Galley on galley by the norland blasts  
Was hurled : adrift with helpless-plunging prows  
Before the whirlwind storm, the rain of spray,  
Vanished they, sheep by a demon shepherd chased.  
And when uprose the sun's clear light, we saw  
The Aegæan Sea, a field of death, whose flowers  
Were corpses of Achaians, wrecks of ships. 660  
Ourselves and our good ship's unshattered hull  
Some God, no man, whose hand was on our helm,  
From doom snatched, or by intercession saved.  
Fortune the Saviour sat and steered the bark,  
That not at anchor riding was she swamped,  
Nor crashed her keel upon the iron-bound shore.

Then, having 'scaped the Hades of the sea,  
 In clear day, doubtful of our own good hap,  
 Over this new disaster brooded we  
 Of the host stricken, beaten small as dust. 670  
 And now, if any of those be breathing yet,  
 Of us they speak as perished men—how not?—  
 As in like manner account we of their plight.  
 Yet may the best befall! For Menelaus,  
 With fullest hope look for him first to come.  
 Yea, if the sun's rays know him yet alive  
 And seeing light, by some device of Zeus,  
 Who wills not yet to annihilate his line,  
 Hope is there that he shall win home again.  
 All hast thou heard; and, know, thou hast heard  
 truth. 680

[Exit.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

Now who was it named her so  
 With such a prophetic name?  
 Was it one whom we may not see?  
 Did the All-foreknowing her doom foreshow  
 Through the tongue that foreshadowed her evil  
 fame,  
 And named her Helen, that she should be  
 Spear-wooed, and a kindler of enmity?  
 Helen?—nay, but a Hell—  
 Read we the riddle well—  
 To the ships, to the heroes, the town, that for her sake  
 fell.  
 She fled from the delicate-costly hangings veiling 690  
 Her couch, on the breath of the Titan West-wind  
 sailing:

But shielded hunters, a warrior host, were chasing  
 Her flight on the printless track of the oars swift-  
     racing,  
 Till there, where the forest mantles Simois' strand,  
 For the blood-stained strife they drave their keels  
     a-land.

(*Ant. 1*)

By relentless Wrath was she brought  
     Unto Ilium—*dear* indeed!— 700  
     By the Wrath that avenged the wrong  
 That her sin to the board of the guest had wrought,  
     And to Zeus, of the guest-bond who taketh heed.  
     Ay, the vengeance came, though it tarried long,  
     On the vaunting chant of the festal throng,  
     Even the bridal lay  
     Which the bridegroom's kin that day  
 Sang to the glory of him who had borne her away.  
 But the ancient city of Priam in dust repenting 710  
 Is learning the dirge of a multitude's lamenting :  
 Yea, and I ween in this hour with bitter sighing  
 'Out upon Paris, the bridegroom of Death!' is she  
     crying  
 Mid the dirge for the blood of her sons that her  
     multitude raise ;  
 For the dregs hath she drained of a cup of ruinous  
     days.

(*Str. 2*)

It was even as when one keepeth  
     A lion-whelp in his home  
     Yet craving the teat wherefrom  
 It was stolen ; in young life's dawning 720  
 Tame, with the children it leapeth :  
     'Tis a joy in the elders' eyes,

And oft in their arms' warm nest  
Like a nursling infant it lies,  
Bright-eyed for caressing, and fawning  
At hunger's imperious hest.

(*Ant.* 2)

But, older grown, it displayeth  
The inherited lion-strain ;  
For it rendeth the sheep it hath slain,  
In requital for nurture : unbidden 730  
That feaster his banquet arrayeth,  
And blood-defiled is the house.  
From its fury the scared slaves quail,  
From the horror murderous  
'Neath that roof for its ruin long hidden,  
A god-sent priest of bale.

(*Str.* 3)

Even so on Ilium-town  
Floated a spirit down  
Of peace, by seeming,  
Of windless peace, a crown 740  
Over her wealth-renown  
Soft splendour beaming ;  
An arrow of desire  
That archer-eyes were winging ;  
A flower soul-thrilling, springing  
Out of love's bed of fire.  
Yet from all this she turned : a bitter ending  
For all that promised bridal bliss she wrought,  
That fatal sojourner and guest descending  
On Priam's line, a Fury ruin-fraught  
From Guest-ward Zeus, tears to their house she  
brought.

(Ant. 3.)

A saying of old—once known 750  
Of all for wisdom's own—

Thus to men crieth :  
' Great weal to fulness grown  
Reaps even as it hath sown,  
Nor childless dieth ;  
But fair prosperity  
Aye bears for man one fated  
Child of her womb, the unsated  
Vampire Misery.'

But I alone stand, holding, as none other,  
That Sin it is, the godless *act*, that bears  
Spawn like itself, foul offspring of foul mother : 760  
But they whose straight path righteousness prepares,  
Fair is their lot, and goodly issue theirs.

(Str. 4.)

But Arrogance, in sin grown grey  
Mid vile men, bears a child at length  
Like her in name, in lusty strength,  
Or soon or late, when dawns her day ;

Yea, and a brother-fiend, whom none  
May cope with, impious Hardihood—  
Black curses twain o'er homes that brood, 770  
And like their dam each demon son.

(Ant. 4.)

In smoke-fouled huts doth Justice shine ;  
On virtuous lives she still hath smiled :  
From gold-tricked halls and hands defiled,  
She turns her with averted eyne.

A guest she is of each pure soul :  
She on the power of wealth looks down,

With all its base coin of renown :                    780  
She guideth all things to their goal.

*Enter Agamemnon in a chariot with Cassandra.*

Hail to the King who hath laid Troy low  
In the dust ! Hail, Atreus' seed !  
How shall I greet thee ? How shall I show  
Reverence due, that the meed  
Of thy welcome be not overshot by the bow,  
Be not under-run by the steed ?  
For many of mortals honour, in sooth,  
Mere semblance, setting at nought heart's truth.  
Ay, ready be all to bear their part  
In bemoaning the stricken—but sorrow's dart       790  
Hath left them unscathed ; it hath pierced not the  
heart.  
They rejoice in thy joy—but their gladness is feigned,  
For the smileless lips are to smiles constrained.  
But a shepherd of folk who is shrewd to discern  
Shall nowise be cheated by eyes that shine  
Soft as from hearts that in loyalty yearn,  
While their love is to true love as water to wine.

But thou, what time yon war-host was arrayed  
For Helen's sake— I will hide nought !—       800  
Wast with no flattering portraiture portrayed  
Of me : by thee the helm of thought  
Was, so deemed I, that day in folly swayed,  
When thou by sacrifice hadst brought  
Back courage unto men of death afraid.  
But now from mine heart's depth all lovingly  
The breeze of loyalty doth blow

To meet thy triumph : thou at last shalt see,  
 By inquisition made shalt know,  
 Who righteously, and who in perfidy  
 Hath ruled thy folk for thee.

AGAMEMNON.

First, Argos and the Gods of fatherland 810  
 I greet, as right is—Gods who wrought with me  
 Mine home-return and that great vengeance done  
 On Priam's town. The cause no human tongue  
 Pleaded, they heard ; and into War's red urn  
 Cast votes for Ilium's sack by warrior-toil  
 With one accord. Unto acquittal's vase,  
 Came hope of votes alone—unfilled it stood.  
 To Ilium's fall yet witnesseth the smoke :  
 Still Atê's flame-blasts live there. Dying down  
 Her ashes spicy-odoured breathe of wealth. 820  
 For this we owe the high Gods gratitude  
 Unfading, seeing the toils of vengeance' net  
 Round her were staked by us : for a woman's sake  
 Stamped flat their town was by the monster Horse  
 That Argos foaled, fraught with its shield-array,  
 Which leapt their walls what time the Pleiads set,  
 When that raw-ravening lion o'er their towers  
 Bounding, of blood of princes lapped his fill.  
 This, for unscanted prelude to the Gods :—  
 The thought thou spakest heard I, nor forget. 830  
 As thine my words are, and my heart as thine.  
 Full few be they in whom there lives inborn  
 Unenvious honour of a prosperous friend.  
 Venom of malice deeply taints the heart,  
 Doubling the burden of a soul diseased  
 That bends 'neath its own trouble not alone,

But sighs to see a neighbour's happiness.  
I speak that I do know ; I have learnt to appraise  
The mockery-friendship—phantom of a shadow—  
Of men who feigned firm loyalty to me. 840  
Only Odysseus, loth albeit he sailed,  
Was my one never-failing yokefellow.  
Of him I say this, whether he be dead  
Or living. Touching Argos and the Gods,  
A general assembly will we call,  
And there take counsel. And we will devise  
How what is well shall long continue so,  
And, whatsoever needeth healing salves,  
By searing brand or knife, in cruelty kind  
Will we essay to medicine the disease. 850  
Now to the halls and hallowed hearths of home  
I pass ; there will I first salute the Gods  
Which sent me forth and have brought home again.  
Triumph attended me ; may it abide.

*Enter Klytemnestra.*

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Citizens, Argive ancients here in place,  
I will not shame before you to confess  
My wifely love. Time makes the fear of man  
To fade away. Not lessoned by the lips  
Of others, will I tell my weary life  
Through long years while my lord beleaguered Troy.  
First, that the wife sit from her lord afar [860  
Lone in the house, is sore calamity ;  
To hear heart-shaking rumours many an one—  
That this man come and that, with tales of woe  
Each worse than other, crying them to the house.



Yea, if my lord had gotten as many wounds  
 As many-channelled rills of rumour told,  
 More than a net, as say they, were he pierced.  
 Had he, as tale on tale affirmed, so died,  
 He might, a second Geryon triple-framed, 870  
 Boast he had gotten threefold vest of earth  
 [Heaped o'er him—nought I say of all beneath,—]<sup>1</sup>  
 Who in each several form one death had died.  
 By reason of these heart-shaking rumours, oft  
 By force did others seize me, and unknit  
 Rafter-hung nooses clinging round my neck.  
 Yea, and our son for this cause stands not here,  
 The warden of our troth-plight, mine and thine,  
 Orestes, as was meet : yet marvel not.  
 Fostered he is by Strophius, Phokis' king, 880  
 Our leal war-helper, who of twofold scathe  
 Forewarned me—peril unto thee by Troy,  
 And peril of clamorous rabble-mutiny  
 Hurling the council down. Inborn in men  
 That proneness is, to trample on the fallen.  
 Think not deceit is lurking 'neath my plea !  
 Ay me ! the gushing fountains of my tears  
 Are dried up now ; no drop upwells therefrom ;  
 And marred with nightlong vigils are mine eyes,  
 While for thy sake I wept the beacon-piles 890  
 Unkindled still. And ever midst my dreams  
 The light wing of the slumbrous-humming gnat  
 Brake off my sleep, while whelming thee I saw  
 More woes than could be in that slumber's space.  
 Now slips my load off ; now with sorrowless soul  
 I hail my lord as dog that wards a fold—

1. A line rejected by good critics as spurious.

Sure mainstay of a ship—firm-stablished pillar  
 Of some high roof—a father's only son—  
 Land sighted past all hope by mariners—  
 Light of a fair, fair dayspring after storm— 900  
 Upwelling rill to thirsty wayfarer—  
 Oh sweet to 'scape from fear's long tyrannous strain!  
 Lo, with such greetings dare I honour him.  
 Gods, be not jealous!—sorrow's measure heaped  
 We have borne already. Now, beloved lord,  
 Step from this car, yet set not on the ground  
 The foot that trampled Troy to ruin-heaps.  
 Handmaids, why tarry ye, whose task it is  
 To spread with woven splendour all his way?  
 His path be straightway purple-paved, that Justice 910  
 To a home may lead him he scarce looked to see.  
 As for the rest—care, never lulled to sleep,  
 Justly shall order fate's work, Heaven to help.

AGAMEMNON.

Daughter of Leda, warder of mine halls,  
 With my long absence well thy speech accords,  
 So long drawn out! But fitting praise and just  
 From other lips must come, and not from thine.  
 For this thing, pamper not in woman-wise  
 Me, nor, like prostrate slave of Asian king,  
 Mouth unto me a grovelling outcry, 920  
 Nor pave with robes my path, so to provoke  
 Heaven's jealousy: ye thus must honour Gods.  
 For me to pace o'er purple braveries—  
 A mortal, me!—I dare not do this thing.  
 As man, not God, do honour unto me.  
 Tush, without footcloths, without tapestries,  
 My fame speaks loud. To keep a sober mind

Is God's best gift. Him happy must we name  
Who wins life's end in sweet prosperity.  
If thus we speed all through, I shall not fear. 930

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah, say not so, to cross my purpose now !

AGAMEMNON.

My purpose, know, I will not disannul.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Through *fear* hast thou so vowed unto the Gods ?

AGAMEMNON.

I know, none better, what I have said : 'tis fixed.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

What think'st thou Priam, triumphing so, had done ?

AGAMEMNON.

Sooth, *he* had paced o'er broidered webs, I trow.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Then stand not thou in awe of blame of men.

AGAMEMNON.

Yet mighty is a people's murmuring.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Tush ! he that is unenvied is unblest.

AGAMEMNON.

It misbeseems a woman so to strive. 940

KLYTEMNESTRA.

It well beseems the fortunate to yield.

AGAMEMNON.

How, car'st thou so for victory in this strife?

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Yield!—nay, of free will grant me to prevail!

AGAMEMNON.

Nay then, if this thou wilt, straight let one loose  
 My shoes, the trampled servants of my feet.  
 May jealous glance of Gods not smite from far  
 Me on sea-purples trampling rich as these!  
 I shame to tread bright raiment in the dust,  
 Marring fair wealth and silver-purchased webs.  
 Thus much for this:—now graciously receive 950  
 This stranger-maid. God kindly looks from far  
 On such as mercifully use their power:  
 For none consenting bows to thraldom's yoke.  
 She, of war-guerdons many the choice flower,  
 The gift of Hellas' host, with me hath come.  
 Now, as constrained to hearken unto thee,  
 Treading on purples to mine halls I pass.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

There is a sea—its well-springs who shall dry?—  
 That breeds the silver-costly purple's flow  
 Abundant, fadeless, wherein vests be plunged. 960  
 Thine halls have store of such, by Heaven's grace,  
 King;  
 Thine house knows not what meaneth lack of aught.  
 Trampling of vests untold would *I* have vowed,  
 Had this in shrines prophetic been enjoined,  
 When I devised rich ransom for thy life.  
 For, while the root lives, foliage climbs the house

Uprearing shade against the dogstar's glare :  
 And thou, in coming to thy palace-hearth,  
 As sun-glow art that comes in winter-tide ;  
 And when in bitter clusters Zeus matures 970  
 Wine, then is quickening coolness in the house,  
 If but the presence of its lord be there.

*(Agamemnon enters palace.)*

Zeus! Zeus Accomplisher! fulfil my prayers!  
 Take thought for that thou meanest to fulfil!

*(Enters palace.)*

*(Str. 1)*

CHORUS.

Why and O why doth this terror insistently haunting  
 me still

Like a bird of black doom hover nigh to the heart  
 that is boding ill?

And a prophecy rings through the song that sings  
 without bidding or guerdon

Evermore in mine ears, like a dream that no seers  
 may interpret, whose burden

No cheering courage, enthroned in sway 980

Over my bosom, may spurn away.

Yet what is there now to be feared?—is the time not  
 long gone by

Since the anchors cast from the sterns gripped fast  
 the sands of Troy,

When thitherward hasted our sea-array?

*(Ant. 1)*

I have looked on the home-return of my King, with  
 mine eyes have I seen :

Myself am my witness—yet oh, the Avenging Spirit's  
 keen

'eals as from the choir of my thoughts : no lyre rings  
there to lighten 990

'he dirge of fear that no hope may cheer, no con-  
fidence brighten !

My soul's dark presage is not for nought,  
Nor the rush of the flood of prophetic thought  
'hat maddens my breast like a whirlpool that raves  
in its cavern-hall.

'et not as this day I forebode, I pray, may the end  
befall, [1000

Not thus to fulfilment the issue be brought !

(Str. 2)

His heart's desire of ease

And of health shall no man win ;

For his neighbour still is disease,

And the party-wall is thin.

And what though the bark of his fate

With a straight course far and fast

Speed—hidden the dark reefs wait

Whereon it shall crash at the last.

O yea, in their fear men fling

The half of their wealth overboard—

As one whirleth a stone from a sling— 1010

To save the rest of their hoard.

So the ship of a house, it may be,

Though a curse have freighted it full,

May not utterly founder, the sea

Not swallow the woe-fraught hull : ' 1

Yea, and not of such loss cometh dearth ;

For by gifts of Zeus's hand,

And by boons of the furrows of earth

From their doors may famine be banned.

(Ant. 2)

But when once at thy feet on the ground  
 Is spilt the blood of the slain, 1020  
 What spell-chant then shall be found  
 That shall gather it up again?  
 Else, wherefore did Zeus' stroke still  
 In stern foreknowledge the breath  
 Of the Master of Healing, whose skill  
 Could raise up mortals from death?  
 Yet—did not a Fate, from of old  
 Established supreme, restrain  
 Even Gods, that they cannot mould  
 Always the doom they ordain—  
 Mine heart would outstrip my tongue,  
 Would pour forth its hidden tale;  
 But darkness around it is hung 1030  
 For a shroud: it must wait and wail;  
 And in anguish of soul, in despair  
 Of unknitting the links of the chain  
 That is dragging my lords to the snare,  
 Aflame is my spirit—in vain!

*Re-enter Klytemnestra.*

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Pass in thou too—Kassandra, thee I name—  
 Since Zeus unangerly hath made thee share  
 Our house's laver-rites, midst many such  
 Our thralls, by Zeus Wealth-warder's altar ranged.  
 Step from the car; be not disdainful-souled.  
 What, even Alkmena's son, men say, of yore 1040  
 Was sold a slave, and brooked to bear the yoke.  
 If then such doom of fortune fall to thee,  
 Thank Heaven if thine be lords of ancient wealth.

They which have reaped rich harvest past their hopes  
Are overmeasure alway stern to thralls :  
With us thou hast all rights of use and wont.

CHORUS.

To thee she saith plain words, and so makes end.  
Since toils of destiny have tangled thee,  
Obey, if this thou wilt—ha ! wouldst refuse !

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay then, except, in swallow-wise, she own      1050  
An uncouth speech of some outlandish folk,  
My words must reach her wit, and must prevail.

CHORUS.

Pass in : what for thy state is best, she saith.  
Obey, and leave thy seat upon the car.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

My leisure serves me not to tarry here  
Without. Beside the hearth, the home's mid-shrine,  
The victims stand, and wait the knife, the fire,  
For us who never hoped to win such grace.  
If thou wilt do my bidding, tarry not :  
But if thou understand not these my words,      1060  
In speech's stead sign with thine alien hand.

CHORUS.

Tis an interpreter the stranger needs,  
Meseems. Her mien is wild as beast new-trapped.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Sure she is mad, hears but her maniac thoughts,  
Who hath left a city newly sacked, and come



Hither, nor yet hath learned to brook the curb,  
Ere she in blood hath foamed away her rage.  
I waste no more words, to be flouted so!

[*Exit.*

CHORUS.

I, for I pity her, will not be wroth.  
Come, hapless maiden thou, avoid yon car. 1070  
Consent to feel fate's yoke, unfelt before.

KASSANDRA. (*Str. 1*)

Woe and alas!—alas, O Earth!  
Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS.

Wherefore for Loxias hast thou raised this cry?  
No God is he for mourners' company.

KASSANDRA. (*Ant. 1*)

Woe and alas!—alas, O Earth!  
Apollo! Apollo!

CHORUS.

Lo, she blasphemes, invokes the God again!  
It fits not he attend the wailers' strain.

KASSANDRA. (*Str. 2*)

Apollo! Apollo! 1080  
O Highway-god, destroyer of me!  
For lightly hast thou this second time destroyed me!

CHORUS.

Lo, words of prophecy of her own ills!  
Even the thrall's soul inspiration thrills.

KASSANDRA. *(Ant. 2)*

Apollo ! Apollo !  
O Highway-god, destroyer of me !  
Whither hast led me, to what roof convoyed me ?

CHORUS.

The Atreids' roof. If thou to this art blind,  
I tell thee : falsehood here thou shalt not find.

KASSANDRA. *(Str. 3)*

Nay, but a haunt of the haters of God, which is  
privy withal 1090  
Unto manifold murders of kinsmen, to gins wherein  
doomed men fall :  
Yea, 'tis a human shambles, the floor of a blood-reek-  
ing hall !

CHORUS.

Keen-scented seems the stranger, like a hound  
Questing the blood-slot till the prey is found.

KASSANDRA. *(Ant. 3)*

Nay, I mistake not : the evidence yonder is plain to  
see.  
There, there be the children that weep for their own  
foul butchery,  
Weep for their flesh that was roasted, a feast for their  
father to be !

CHORUS.

Sooth, thy prophetic fame hath reached our ears ;  
But for that ancient tale we need no seers.

KASSANDRA. (Str. 4)

What plotteth the plotter?—woe and alas! 1100  
 What strange dark deed in the house this day  
 Is devised, yea, now is coming to pass  
 Unendurable, cureless, while helpers stay  
 Ah, far away!

CHORUS.

This thy last bodement's mark I cannot hit :  
 That know I ; all the city rings with it.

KASSANDRA. (Ant. 4)

Even now, O wretch, dost thou compass the deed !  
 Thy lord in the bath thou refreshest—ah how,  
 How shall I utter the issue?—with speed  
 Shall it come!—thine hand to the blade stretchest  
 thou 1110  
 Even now, even now !

CHORUS.

Not yet I understand : perplexed am I  
 Now, after riddles, by dark prophecy.

KASSANDRA. (Str. 5)

Ha, horror on horror ! What yonder riseth ?—  
 A net is this ?—O meshes of hell !  
 And the net is his wife !—his death she deviseth.  
 Now let the unglutted Furies yell  
 O'er the sacrifice that she sacrificeth !—  
 Oh, a death of stoning should guerdon it well !

CHORUS.

What, what Erinnyes summonest thou to wail  
 This house's dirge ?—thy words have made me quail.  
 Back to mine heart the ruddy life-drops run, [1120

Such drops as, in life's fated even falling,  
Beat time unto the sinking of life's sun :—  
I hear doom, swift doom, calling !

KASSANDRA. (*Ant.* 5)

Ha see ! ha see !—from his mate deliver  
The bull !—her treachery-robcs adorn  
Him whom a victim trapped they give her ;  
And she hews down him of the sable horn.  
In the brimming laver his limp limbs quiver !—  
Of the bath of murder I warn thee—I warn !

CHORUS.

In divination may I boast no skill : 1130  
Yet these words, as I deem, forebode but ill.  
But—out of oracles what word of aid  
Is framed for man ? These bodings weirdly-ringing  
Come mischief-fraught to hearts that hear dismayed  
Their lessons terror-bringing.

KASSANDRA. (*Str.* 6)

Woe, woe is me for the ill doom wrought upon me the  
evil-starred !—  
Ay, for I moan my doom—mine own with my lord's  
fate now do I blend.  
Unto what end, O lost king, hast thou brought the  
hapless hitherward ?  
For nought but to be here slain with thee !—what  
other can be the end ?

CHORUS.

O frenzied heart, O demon-possessed, who touching  
thyself hast chanted 1140

A tuneless strain, like the sad refrain of the nightin-  
gale tawny-golden  
Who for Itys, Itys, with burdened breast, with spirit  
misery-haunted  
Wails on and on, while the long days run of a life  
with woes enfolden.

KASSANDRA. (Ant. 6)

Ah me, that the doom of the nightingale clear-voiced  
mine own might be!  
For in plume and wing soft-compassing the Gods her  
body arrayed;  
And her life-days pass like a pleasant tale, and from  
tears of sorrow free.  
But for me doth wait a merciless fate—the stroke of  
the two-edged blade!

CHORUS.

Ah whence be the god-given visions that crowd on  
thee, horrors rashly boded? 1150  
This tale thou hast told hast thou shaped in the mould  
of song where is death's voice crying!  
Thine ominous strains are shrilling loud with an  
utterance terror-loaded.  
Where be they found, the limits that bound the paths  
of thy weird prophesying?

KASSANDRA. (Str. 7)

Woe for the wedlock of Paris, for all whom he loved  
ruin-laden!  
Woe for Skamander, the stream that our fathers  
knew!

Once, once on thy margent nurtured, a misery-fated  
maiden,

To womanhood I grew.

Now on the brink of the River of Wailing, the Stream  
of Despair, 1160

'Neath the imminent darkness I shiver : my prophecy-  
chant ends there !

CHORUS.

What thing hast thou uttered ?—too plain for mistak-  
ing !

To a babe that had heard it its import were clear.

As a stab my heart felt it—mine heart is aching  
For thy bitterest doom, for thine heart that is breaking  
'Neath horrors I pale to hear.

KASSANDRA. (*Ant.* 7)

Woe for the city through long-drawn agonies ruinward  
reeling !

Woe for the altars whereon my sire offered up  
Pastureland-nurslings by hecatombs, yet no salve of  
healing

Dropped thence in the deadly cup 1170

Troy drank : there was no returning from death's  
door, none that would save !

And I—full soon shall my burning heart be stilled in  
the grave.

CHORUS.

'Tis the same song still from thy lips outrushing !

A malignant God is constraining thee,  
Descending upon thee with might soul-crushing,  
That the wine of death from thy spirit is gushing.

But the end—oh, what shall it be ?

## KASSANDRA.

Nay then, no more the oracle through veils  
 Shall shyly peer, like some new-wedded bride ;  
 But cloudless-clear to sunriseward, I wot, 1180  
 Its wind shall blow, till, like a crashing surge,  
 Flash to the light a mightier woe than all.  
 No more by riddles will I lesson you :  
 Ye, coursing with me, witness how I scent  
 The slot of evil deeds wrought long ago.  
 List—never leaves yon roof that chorus-crew  
 Whose harmony is discord—a curse-chant.  
 They have lapped up human blood ; so, bolder grown,  
 Aye haunt the house that hellish revel-rout  
 Whose presence none may ban, the Sister Fiends. 1190  
 There brooding o'er the halls they chant their hymn,  
 The Primal Curse, anon spit loathing on  
 The Brother's Bed which ruined its defiler.<sup>1</sup>  
 Ha, have I missed, or shot like archer true ?  
 ' Prophet of lies ' am I, and ' street-door babblers ' ?  
 First take thou oath, then witness that I know,  
 Untaught, this house's sins of long ago.

## CHORUS.

Nay, how should oath-plight in all honour given  
 Bring healing here ? Yet marvel I that thou,  
 Nursed oversea, should of an alien town 1200  
 Speak, and speak sooth, as one that dwelt therein.

## KASSANDRA.

Prophet Apollo made this office mine.

1. Alluding to the adultery of Thyestes with Aeropê, wife of his brother Atreus.

CHORUS.

A God—yet smitten with desire of thee!

KASSANDRA.

I shamed to speak of this tale heretofore.

CHORUS.

Ay, with prosperity goes ever pride.

KASSANDRA.

A fervent suitor he, who breathed fierce love.

CHORUS.

Came ye together by love's ordinance?

KASSANDRA.

I promised Loxias—then I broke my troth.

CHORUS.

His boon already given of prophecy?

KASSANDRA.

To Troy already I foretold her woes.

1210

CHORUS.

How couldst thou pass unscathed of Loxias' ire?

KASSANDRA.

No man believed me—my sin's wage was this.

CHORUS.

Yet seem to us these thy soothsayings true.

KASSANDRA.

Ah me! ah me! Woe for the curse, the curse!  
Again they rack me, prophecy's dread throes



With terror-prelude agonizing me !  
See ye yon shapes upon the roof that sit—  
Babes, like unto the phantoms of a dream ?  
Children, slain as it were by their own kin,  
With hands filled full of their own flesh for meat, 1220  
Grasping their hearts, their entrails, full in view,  
Most piteous load, which their own father ate !  
Vengeance for this, I tell thee, a craven lion,  
Home-skulker from the wars, is plotting now  
Against the hero on whose couch he lolls,  
My lord—since needs must I bear thralldom's yoke.  
Ah ! the fleet's chieftain, who laid Troy in dust,  
Knows not what treason yonder hell-hound's tongue  
By fair speech long drawn out, an Atê lurking  
Ambushed, shall bring to pass—a curse on her ! 1230  
This deed she dares—a woman slays her lord !  
What loathly monster shall I name her now,  
And err not ?—' Snake two-headed ? '—or a Scylla  
Haunter of rock-clefts, bane of mariners ?  
Or raging dam of Hades, breathing out  
For her lord truceless war ? She shouted o'er him,  
All-reckless, as men shout for battle turned.  
She feigns rejoicing for his safe return.  
Heed me or not, 'tis all one : wherefore fret ?  
That which shall be will come. Right soon shalt thou  
Pitying confess me all too true a seer. [1240

CHORUS.

Thyestes' banquet on his children's flesh  
Shuddering I recognise, and awed am I  
To hear this o'er-true tale in nothing feigned.  
The rest—wide of thy boding's track I run.

KASSANDRA.

Agamemnon's doom, I say, thou shalt behold.

CHORUS.

Peace, wretched maid! Hush thine ill tongue asleep!

KASSANDRA.

Ay, sooth, no Healer-god attends this word.

CHORUS.

No! if it come to pass—which God forbid!

KASSANDRA.

Thou dost but *pray*—at murder's work are these! 1250

CHORUS.

What man hath taken this foul deed in hand?

KASSANDRA.

Utterly hast thou missed my boding's drift.

CHORUS.

I grasp not its accomplisher's device.

KASSANDRA.

Yet all too well I know your Hellene tongue.

CHORUS.

So Pythian oracles do; yet dark are they.

KASSANDRA.

O me! what fire is this climbs o'er mine head!

Woe's me, Light-king Apollo, woe is me!

Yon human lioness that with the wolf

Coucheth, while stays afar the nobler lion,

Shall slay me, wretched me ! and with the cup 1260  
Of vengeance shall she blend my punishment :  
And vaunts, while for her lord she whets the brand,  
Of death-wage waiting him who brings me hither.  
Why then wear I these mockeries of myself—  
The staff, the wreaths prophetic on my neck ?  
These, ere mine own doom come, will I destroy.  
Down to destruction ye !—I follow soon.  
Make rich some other lost wretch in my stead !  
Behold ! Apollo's self is stripping me  
Of prophet-vesture ! Me he long hath watched 1270  
In these arrayed, a very laughing-stock  
Of kin unkind—all wrong with one accord !  
They called me vagrant, juggling mountebank,  
A starveling beggar-wretch : and I bore all.  
And now the Seer hath unmade me, his seer,  
And haled me captive to this doom of death.  
For my sire's altar, waits the heading-block  
For me, to reek hot with the victim's blood.  
Yet not by Gods all outlawed shall I die :  
For mine avenger shall hereafter come, 1280  
The mother-slayer, his father's nemesis.  
The wandering exile shall from banishment  
Return, to set doom's topstone on his house.  
For a great oath has by the Gods been sworn  
That his dead father's corse shall draw him home.  
What do I moaning pitifully here ?  
Since I beheld erewhile our Ilium-town  
Faring as she hath fared, and in such plight  
By the Gods' sentence those her captors are,  
I too will go, will brace myself to die. 1290  
Lo, as the gates of Hades greet I these.  
I pray to feel one mortal stroke—but one ;

That without anguish-throe, while ebbs my blood  
In pangless death, so I may close mine eyes.

CHORUS.

O thou thrice-hapless woman and thrice-wise,  
Long speech hath thine been! Yet, if this thy doom  
Truly thou knowest, why unfaltering pace  
To the altar, like some consecrated steer?

KASSANDRA.

Escape is brought no nearer by delay.

CHORUS.

At least time's vantage hath the last to die. 1300

KASSANDRA.

Mine hour is come—small gain were won by flight.

CHORUS.

A resolute woman thou, a dauntless soul!

KASSANDRA.

Nay but 'tis something like a queen to die.

CHORUS.

Oh hapless who win such pathetic praise!

KASSANDRA.

Woe for thee, father, and thy noble sons!

*(Goes to the palace-door, and recoils from it.)*

CHORUS.

What meaneth this?—what horror turns thee back?

KASSANDRA.

Pah!

CHORUS.

What sickens thee?—is't aught thy soul abhors?

KASSANDRA.

Murder: the house reeks all adrip with blood.

CHORUS.

How?—this is scent of incense from the hearth. 1310

KASSANDRA.

It is a very charnel-house's breath!

CHORUS.

Thou dost misname the balm of Araby.

KASSANDRA.

I go—yea, therewithin to wail mine own  
And Agamemnon's doom: enough of life.  
Ah strangers!

Not at a bush, like bird once limed, I quake  
For naught. Bear ye this witness to my death,  
When, for the woman me, a woman dies,  
And, for a man mismated, falls a man.  
I, on death's threshold, do but beg this boon. 1320

CHORUS.

Brave heart, I pity thy foreboded fate.

KASSANDRA.

Once more I fain would utter speech—no dirge  
Over myself: I pray for this last time  
The sun's light, that mine hateful murderers  
May all at once to mine avengers pay  
Quittance for this slain thrall, this helpless prey.

Ah, human life!—when most it prospereth,  
 'Tis but a pencil-outline. Let fate frown—  
 Dashed with a wet sponge all the picture fades . . .  
 Sadder than mine I count the common lot. 1330  
 (*Enters the palace.*)

CHORUS.

Who hath drunken his fill of the chalice  
 Of happiness? Who from the door  
 Ever thrust her of proudest palace,  
 Crying, 'Enter thou here never more!'   
 To our King have the Blessèd Ones given  
 To lay waste Priam's town,  
 And he comes, by the Lords of Heaven  
 Hither brought home with renown.  
 Yet now, if his blood must atone  
 For some that were long since slain,  
 If his death for a slaughtered one  
 Be a link in the vengeance-chain, 1340  
 Who among mortals shall dare,  
 When he heareth his story, scorn  
 The lesson thereof, and declare  
 'Neath a happier star was I born?'

AGAMEMNON (*within*).

*O me! I am stabbed deep with a mortal blow!*

CHORUS I.

Hist!—Who crieth '*I am stabbed?*' Who there is  
 wounded mortally?

AGAMEMNON (*within*).

*O me!—they stab me yet the second time!*

## CHORUS 2.

Done already is the deed, meseems, by Agamemnon's  
cry !

Nay, in common counsel join we : safety shall be  
found thereby.

## CHORUS 3.

For me, this is my counsel unto you :  
Call the folk hither, raise the rescue-cry.

## CHORUS 4.

Into the palace break forthright, say I, 1350  
And by the dripping sword convict the deed.

## CHORUS 5.

Such is my counsel : thus I cast my vote—  
Be something done. No time for dallying this !

## CHORUS 6.

Nay, that is clear : they are in act to raise  
Their usurpation's ensign o'er the town.

## CHORUS 7.


We trifle time. They trample underfoot  
All semblance of delay. Their hand sleeps not.

## CHORUS 8.

I cannot tell what counsel should be best.  
'Tis his to counsel who is ready to act.

## CHORUS 9.

Yea, so think I ; for I discern no art 1360  
Whereby with words to raise from death the dead.



CHORUS 10.

How?—basely cling to life, and crouch and cringe  
To these usurping lords who shame the house?

CHORUS 11.

Nay, 'twere past bearing! Better far to die.  
Death were a milder doom than tyranny.

CHORUS 12.

Shall we, from tokens darkly vague as cries  
Of pain, divine that dead a warrior lies?

CHORUS 13.

We may not, ere we know, break into wrath.  
Conjecture and clear knowledge are not one.

CHORUS 14.

This rede, which all give, hath my full assent, 1370  
Clearly to learn how Agamemnon fares.

*(The back-scene opens, displaying corpses of Agamemnon and Cassandra. Klytemnestra steps forward.)*

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Much in time past I spake to serve the time,  
And blush not now to speak contrariwise.  
Else, how should one who plots the doom of foes,  
False friends, stake round them toils of mischief, raise  
A net-wall higher than the prey may leap?  
This struggle—I planned it long since, brooding aye  
On that old wrong. O late my vengeance came!  
Now all is done: firm stand I where I smote.  
And so I wrought—O, I deny it not!— 1380  
That he could flee not nor avert his fate.



A gapless net in fisher-wise I drew  
 Round him, a web with ample verge of doom.  
 I smote him—twice: two wild shrieks, and his limbs  
 Sank nerveless down; and, even as he lay,  
 A third I dealt, in thanks for answered prayer  
 To Hades, Saviour of the earth-veiled dead.  
 So, as he fell, he gasped his life away;  
 And spirting forth the sharp strong gush of gore  
 He dashed me with the dark spray, murder's dew, 1390  
 Who joyed as joys sown land to feel the boon  
 Of God's rain in the travail of the ear.  
 Since thus it is, O Argive elders, now  
 Rejoice, if ye can joy: I—I exult!  
 If one might make libation o'er a corpse,  
 Well might I over this, ay, more than well.  
 The bowl of all the accursèd ills he brimmed  
 In his own house, himself came home to drain.

## CHORUS.

I marvel at thy tongue's bold hardihood,  
 Who moutheest out such vaunt above thy lord! 1400

## KLYTEMNESTRA.

Ye look to cower me like some witless quean:  
 But I with heart unawed to you who know  
 Speak:—whether thou hast wit to praise or blame  
 Is all one:—this is Agamemnon, late  
 My lord, a corpse. This hand that did the deed  
 Wrought righteousness. The truth is as I say.

## CHORUS.

(Str.)

Woman, what poison hast eaten, what drug that hath  
 cursed earth's womb,

Drunk of what potion envenomed upcast with the  
 sea's bitter spume,  
 Thou o'er whose altar the sacrifice-smoke is the  
 curse of a nation ?  
 Traitress and murderess !—henceforth be thou cityless,  
 Monster, the whole land's execration ! [1410

KLYTEMNESTRA.

On me thou passest sentence !—banishment  
 And hate of Argos, and a nation's curse—  
 Yet didst not move a finger against this man,  
 Who—heeding *her* fate no more than a beast's  
 Where sheep swarm countless in their fleecy herds,—  
 Slaughtered his child, of all my travail's fruit  
 Most dear, a charm to lull the Norland winds.  
 Him ought ye not have banished from the land  
 For his foul sin ? But, hearing of my deeds, 1420  
 A stern judge art thou ! Now I say to thee,  
 E'en threaten on—prepared am I to meet  
 All force with force—to lord it over me ;  
*But vanquish first !* If God rule otherwise,  
 Thou shalt learn sanity—o'erlate for thee.

CHORUS.

(*Ant.*)

Haughty of spirit art thou, overweening the words of  
 thy lips :  
 Raveth thy soul as one cursed by a fate wherein shed  
 blood drips !  
 Plain to behold on thy brow is the stain of murder's  
 pollution  
 Still unavenged ! Thou shalt yet, of helpers forsaken,  
 be met  
 By the sword that shall deal thee the sword's  
 retribution. 1430

## KLYTEMNESTRA.

Now must thou hear this ordinance of mine oath—  
 By the accomplished vengeance for my child,  
 By Atê, Erinnyes, unto whom I slew him,  
 Mine expectation treads no Hall of Fear,  
 So long as burns one flame upon mine hearth,  
 Ægisthus, loyal to me as heretofore :  
 For my stout shield of confidence is he.  
 Low lies yon man, his wife's dishonourer,  
 That fondling of Chryseïds many at Troy :  
 Low lies his captive thrall, the portent-seer 1440  
 Who shared one bed with him, the soothsayer  
 His couchmate leal, who on the ship-thwarts sat  
 Close-nestling to him. These have their deserts !  
 He, even as I have said : she, like a swan,  
 Hath chanted her last strain, a dirge of death,  
 And lies, his darling, there. She hath dressed for me  
 A dainty bridal-dish for my delight.

## CHORUS.

Not with agony-throe  
 On my frame may he leap,  
 Nor with long-delayed blow  
 Round my sick-bed creep—  
 Yet oh, might Death come to me straightway, and  
 bring me the morningless sleep ! 1450  
 For my guardian, my lord  
 Low, low hath been brought :  
 For a woman he warred,  
 And great deeds hath he wrought—  
 And behold, by a woman his life and the glory thereof  
 are made nought !

Oh madness of lust  
 Of Helen, through whom  
 Were multitudes thrust  
 Through the gates of the tomb !  
 One woman—and she before Troy unto lives without  
 number was doom !

Unwashed, unforgot  
 Lay the old murder-stain :  
 Thou hast made the dark blot  
 Blush crimson again ;  
 and the ancient feud of the house is become its  
 master's bane. 1460

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Tush, pray not for death  
 As in grief for deeds past,  
 Neither Helen with breath  
 Of a curse do thou blast  
 as the murderess, bane of her people, the woe that  
 for ever shall last.

CHORUS.

Fiend, this work is thine  
 Who dost swoop with foul wings  
 On the twin-branchèd line  
 Of the Tantalid kings,  
 Thine this armèd rebellion of women, a horror my  
 spirit that stings. 1470

As a raven stands tearing  
 The corpse of one slain,

So stands she all-daring  
O'er him, and the strain  
Of her triumph she chanteth, her exultation's jarring  
refrain.

## KLYTEMNESTRA.

True word was that same  
When the Fiend thrice-great  
Of this house thou didst name:  
For the blood-lust of hate  
Evermore he rekindleth, and fresh wounds are dealt  
ere the old pang abate. 1480

## CHORUS.

Of a fiend hast thou vaunted  
Who is strong to prevail,  
Whose fury hath haunted  
This house for its bale—  
Alas, the insatiate ruinous Fate of thine evil tale!

Ah, 'twas done as He willed  
Who is First Cause of all!  
When is purpose fulfilled  
Of man, save as thrall  
Of Zeus?—what thing of all these did not He fore-  
ordain to befall?

Oh my King! oh my chief!  
For thee how shall I cry?  
How shall love wail its grief, 1490  
While thou so nigh  
Foully slain in this web of a spider outgasping thy  
life dost lie?

Woe for yon bed !  
 Tamely slain like a slave  
 There my King lieth dead,  
 Thrust down to the grave  
 By the steel in the fingers of treachery clutched, by  
 the two-edged glaive !

KLYTEMNESTRA.

And dar'st thou maintain  
 That of me it was done ? . . . .  
 By no wife was he slain,  
 This Atreus' son ;  
 But in shape of the wife of this corpse did the ancient  
 terrible one, 1500

The Avenging Sprite,  
 To exact the price  
 Of the foul feast dight  
 By Atreus, arise,  
 And for babes once slaughtered he claimed this man  
 for the sacrifice.

CHORUS.

Who shall witness for thee  
 That thine hands are clean—  
 Ah, how can it be ?—  
 Of this murder, O Queen ?  
 Yet—yet the ancestral Avenger may well thine  
 accomplice have been ;

For onward, unstayed  
 As a torrent in flood, 1510

Dark Havoc doth wade  
Through kindred blood  
Till he come to the day of atonement for babes that  
were slaughtered for food.

Oh my King ! oh my chief !  
For thee how shall I cry ?  
How shall love wail its grief  
While thou so nigh  
Foully slain in this web of a spider outgassing thy  
life dost lie ?

Woe for yon bed !  
Tamely slain like a slave  
There my king lieth dead,  
Thrust down to the grave  
By the steel in the fingers of treachery clutched, by  
the two-edgèd glaive ! 1520

## KLYTEMNESTRA.

Treachery !—*mine* ?  
*His* treachery first  
Polluted his line  
With child-murder accurst  
Of Iphigeneia, for whom fell my tears in a torrent-  
outburst !

Is this child-slayer's doom not  
The child-slayer's meed ?  
Ha, let him presume not  
In Hades to plead  
Against me !—for the steel hath avenged her whom he  
by the steel made bleed.

CHORUS.

My mind is distraught : 1530

Yea, hid from mine eyes

Be the pathways of thought ;

And I cannot devise

Whither to turn in this hour when the house in ruin  
lies.

Lo, the blood-rain of doom !—

The first droppings are o'er—

It is sapping the home :

My heart quakes at its roar !

Hark ! Fate on new whetstones is whetting the  
vengeance of one wrong more !

Oh Earth, that mine eyes

Had been dark 'neath thy veil

Ere I saw how he lies

On this bed of bale 1540

'Twixt the silvern walls of the bath ! Who shall bury  
him ?—who shall bewail ?

Wilt thou dare such a thing—

Even thou who didst slay !—

With thy death-dirge to wing

Thy lord's soul on its way ?

For his mighty achievements such graceless grace  
wouldst unrighteously pay ?

Ah, who shall upraise

O'er the godlike dead

The death-chant of praise ?

What mourner shall shed

Tears, and with sorrow unfeignèd the path to his  
grave-mound tread ? 1550



## KLYTEMNESTRA.

Not unto thee  
Doth this care appertain :  
By me, even me,  
Did he fall, was he slain :  
I will bury him, I—but not with laments of his  
household-train ;

But his daughter shall meet him,  
As fitting it is,  
With embraces shall greet him,  
And welcoming kiss :  
By the swift-flowing River of Anguish shall Iphigeneia  
do this !

## CHORUS.

The reproach that I said 1560  
Is hurled back in my face !  
He were hardly bestead  
Who would judge in such case.  
Lo, how the spoiler is spoiled, how the slayer atone-  
ment pays !

Stands the ordinance sure  
While the years of Zeus run,  
That in suffering the doer  
Pay for all he hath done.  
From this house who shall banish the curse-brood ?—  
with ruin 'tis knit into one.

## KLYTEMNESTRA.

Now dost thou attain  
To true doctrine at last.

But for me, I were fain  
 To make oath-plight fast  
 With the fiend of the Pleisthenid house, to consent  
 unto all that is past, 1570

Be it never so grievous,  
 So he, through all days  
 Hereafter, would leave us,  
 To some strange race  
 Forth passing, with bloodshed of kin to afflict the  
 same in our place.

Lo, for me it were well  
 To have scant wealth-store,  
 So I might but dispel  
 That cloud evermore  
 Which hath darkened with madness of murder-re-  
 venges these halls from of yore.

*Enter Ægisthus.*

ÆGISTHUS.

Hail, gracious light of retribution's day !  
 Now I confess that the avenging Gods  
 On earth's abominations look from heaven,  
 When I behold this man, glad sight for me, 1580  
 Here lying in the net the Erinnyes wove  
 Punished for plots his father's hand contrived.  
 For Atreus, king of Argos, this man's sire,  
 Drove forth from home and city, a banished man,  
 My sire Thyestes—the plain truth is this—  
 His brother, rival with him for the throne.

Then suppliant to his hearth returning back,  
Hapless Thyestes won reprieve from doom,  
That his life-blood stained not his native soil:—  
But Atreus, godless father of yon man, 1590  
Feigning, with hate that smiled all eagerness,  
A banquet-day to welcome home my sire,  
Set on the board for meat his children's flesh.  
The feet, the comb-like fingers of the hands,  
In secret from the limbs he snapped away  
That none might mark. Unwittingly the sire  
Ate food which was, thou seest, this house's doom.  
Then, being made ware of that unholy deed,  
Shrieked, reeled back from the butchery vomiting,  
Cursed with an awful curse all Pelops' seed, 1600  
Spurning the board in symbol of malison—  
*'So perish all the line of Pleisthenes!'*  
For this cause seest thou this man lying here;  
And I am righteous plotter of his murder.  
Me, yet a nursling, and my brethren twelve,  
His father banished, with mine hapless sire:  
Now, grown to man, hath Justice led me home,  
And mine arm even from exile reached my foe;  
For each device of this dark plot I framed.  
Now would I hold it glorious to die, 1610  
Who have seen this man in toils of Justice trapped.

## CHORUS.

Ægisthus, insolence linked with guilt I scorn!  
Thou say'st thou slewest this man wilfully,  
The sole deviser of this piteous murder.  
Thine head, be sure, in justice shall not 'scape  
The curse of stoning at the people's hands.

ÆGISTHUS.

And this to me, from thee, at the lowest oar  
 Sitting—to me, throned on the upper tier !  
 Thou shalt learn, dotard,—learn a bitter lesson  
 For one so old—discretion's hest shalt learn ! 1620  
 Bondage and hunger-pangs physicians are  
 Right skilful, even to school the stubbornness  
 Of old age. Having eyes, canst see not this ?  
 Spurn not the goad, lest thou in misery fall.

CHORUS.

*Woman !*—didst thou, home-skulker, wait till men  
 Came home from war, shaming a hero's bed  
 The while, and plot a hero-chieftain's doom ?

ÆGISTHUS.

What, knave, these malapert words shall breed thee  
 tears !  
 Far other tongue is thine than Orpheus had :  
 He drew all things by his song's witchery ; 1630  
 Thou, by thy witless yelpings angering us,  
 Shalt be thyself dragged, to be crushed and tamed.

CHORUS.

And thou forsooth shalt be the Argives' king—  
 Who, when thou hadst contrived this hero's death,  
 Dar'dst not with thine own hand do murder's work !

ÆGISTHUS.

By guile to take him was the wife's part, sure :  
 Me, as an ancient foe, suspicion watched.  
 But I by this man's treasure will essay

To rule this people. Who so disobeys  
Shall, yoked in heavy bands, strain in the shafts, 1640  
No full-fed trace-horse! Hunger, pitiless  
Dweller with darkness, shall behold him tame.

## CHORUS.

Couldst thou not find it in thy dastard soul  
To kill this man thyself, but his own wife,  
Pollution of this land and of its Gods,  
Must slay him? Ha, Orestes lives, I wot,  
Lives to come hither home by fortune's grace,  
And conqueror be and slayer of these twain!

## ÆGISTHUS.

Since thou art determined so to do and speak, thou  
soon shalt know—  
Up, my loyal comrades! 'Tis the hour for action!  
Guardsmen, ho! 1650

*Guards of Ægisthus pour on to the stage.*

## CHORUS.

On then ye!—Let every man grip ready drawn the  
naked brand!

## ÆGISTHUS.

Ay, and I shrink not from dying, so I perish sword in  
hand.

## CHORUS.

*Die*—thou say'st? We hail the omen! Victory for  
us, and life!

*Enter Klytemnestra.*

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, my best-beloved ; to evils past add not new  
curse of strife :

Surely in the deeds achieved a woeful harvest have  
we reaped :

Sorrow have we now enough ; let hands no more in  
blood be steeped.

Pass thou—ancients, pass to homes that fate beneath  
our sway hath brought,

Ere ye do and suffer scathe. These things must needs  
have so been wrought.

If the troubles past suffice you, we consent the past  
be past,

Whom the Avenger's heavy wrath hath smitten with  
misfortune's blast. 1660

Lo, a woman's rede is this, if any deign to learn  
thereby.

ÆGISTHUS.

But that these at me should flicker tongues that  
blossom vanity !—

Yea, should hurl against me railings such as these,  
and tempt their fate,

Wander wide from paths of prudence, and insult my  
kingly state !

CHORUS.

Ne'er shall this be Argives' wont, to cringe to villain  
reprobate !

ÆGISTHUS.

Ha ! but I will surely visit this on thee in days to  
come !

CHORUS.

Nay, not thou!—if haply God shall guide Orestes  
hither home!

ÆGISTHUS.

Tush! I know the food of exiles—hope, a never-fruit-  
ing flower!

CHORUS.

Work thy pleasure : batten, fouling justice, while it is  
thine hour!

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou shalt yet, be sure, requite me for thy folly  
babbled now! 1670

CHORUS.

Vapour with a valorous mien, a cock beside his harem  
thou!

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Reck not thou of these, to heed their empty yelpings :  
thou and I,  
Rulers now of town and palace-halls, will rule them  
royally.

[*Exeunt Omnes.*

**CHOEPHOROE,**  
**OR**  
**THE MOURNERS.**





## ARGUMENT.

WHEN the sin of *Ægisthus* and *Klytemnestra* began, they sent away *Agamemnon's* young son, *Orestes*, to the far land of *Phocis*, where King *Strophius* warded him safely, and *Pylades* the king's son loved him as a brother. So, when seven years, as *Homer* tells, had passed since the murder of *Agamemnon*, and *Orestes* was grown to man, he went to the oracle of *Delphi*, and inquired of *Apollo* what he should do to avenge his father, and to recover his inheritance; and the god bade him slay the murderers, straitly commanding him in no wise to spare his mother.

And herein is told how he returned secretly to *Mycenæ*, and found there his sister *Electra*, who dwelt in great affliction and abasement, by reason of her love for the dead, and how these twain devised and accomplished the bidding of the oracle.

In translating this play I have generally adopted the interpretation, and sometimes the reading, of Dr. Tucker's edition of the '*Choëphoroe*.'

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *his friend, son of Strophius King of Phocis.*

ELECTRA, *daughter of Agamemnon.*

KLYTEMNESTRA, *wife and murderess of Agamemnon.*

ÆGISTHUS, *sharer in the guilt of Klytemnestra.*

NURSE.

DOOR-KEEPER.

MESSENGER.

CHORUS, *consisting of Trojan captives, handmaids of  
the palace.*

SCENE :—In front of the Palace at Mycenæ.

CHOEPHOROE,  
OR  
THE MOURNERS.

*Enter Orestes and Pylades.*

ORESTES.

NETHERWORLD Hermes, steward of thy Sire's powers,  
My saviour be and ally ; hear my prayer !  
For to this land from exile back I come,  
And on this grave-mound to my father cry  
To hear my voice, to hearken my appeal.  
This lock, my nurture's due to Inachus,  
This too, my mourning-offering, I shear ;  
For not by thee I stood to wail thy fate,  
Father, nor waved thy grave-borne corpse farewell.

. . . . .

Ha ! what is this I see ?—what concourse draws 10  
Hither of women in black vesture clad ?  
What stroke of fate shall I divine herefrom ?  
Hath some new trouble lighted on the house ?  
Or guess I aright, divining that these bear  
Balm to the dead, drink-offerings to my sire ?  
Nought else may this be ; for methinks I see  
My sister Electra pacing there in grief  
Pre-eminent. Grant me, Zeus, to avenge my sire !  
Be of thy grace a champion unto me !

Pylades, stand we aside, that I may learn                    20  
Surely what means this suppliant maiden-train.

[*Exeunt.*

*Enter Electra, with Chorus, bearing libations.*

CHORUS.                    (*Str. 1*)

Forth of the doors of the palace  
In procession of woe have I sped,  
With drink-offerings brimming the chalice,  
With hands raining blows on mine head,  
With cheeks scored with furrows red-staining  
The fingers that do them despite,  
With a heart that hath tears of complaining  
For its meat day and night.

Lo, how for sorrows unending  
My raiment is utterly marred ;  
Lo, how with comfortless rending  
The fair-woven vesture is scarred,  
The vesture whose fold on my bosom  
Unseemly buffeted lies  
Since calamity withered the blossom                    30  
Of smiles from mine eyes.

(*Ant. 1*)

For a horror prophetic, heart-thrilling,  
Made the hair of our flesh uprise :  
Out of slumber it shook us, filling  
Our ears with wrathful cries.  
Out of hollows of darkness calling  
Came a voice at the midnight hour  
Terror-winged, like a thunderbolt falling  
On the women's bower.

Then they unto whom divination  
Of vision and dream appertained  
Spake by the Gods' inspiration  
As men by the truth constrained,  
Spake, saying, ' A slain man, lying  
In the grave, for the vengeance due 40  
In exceeding wrath is crying  
Against them who slew.'

(Str. 2)

And the godless woman is sending  
Me—O Earth Mother !—to pay  
A graceless grace, that impending  
Ills may be turned away.  
Yet to pour on the grave the oblation,  
And to utter the prayer, I dread :  
O, how can there be expiation  
For the life-blood shed ?

Woe for the hearth polluted,  
The hearth that is misery all,  
For the ancient stock disrooted,  
For the house that bows to its fall ! 50  
A sunless night hath enshrouded  
In darkness of all men abhorred  
The house that is curse-overclouded  
Through the death of its lord.

(Ant. 2)

Invincible, quenchless, unfailing  
Loyalty spake of yore  
In men's ears, wrought all-prevailing  
In their hearts—it is found no more :  
Only the strong hand fear they ;  
Yea, power, that holdeth the rod

O'er their heads, as a god revere they,  
 Nay, more than a god. 60

Yet Justice is watching, to humble  
 The haughty : her swift dooms smite  
 Some at midnight ; some stumble  
 On the marches of darkness and light  
 Ere the pangs long-evaded, that followed  
 Aye, turn their bliss unto gall.  
 Some—have they escaped ? They are swallowed  
 In night that ends all !

(*Str.* 3)

When earth, man's nurse, hath once drunk in the  
 life-blood's red pollution,  
 The stain that cries for vengeance lies, a never-  
 cleansed clot ;  
 Even so the Curse that hoards for sin long pangs of  
 retribution  
 May tarry while the all-cankering thing, his soul's  
 disease, is ripening ;  
 But ne'er forgetteth, spareth not.

(*Ant.* 3)

As remedy is none, nor cure, when once the portals,  
 keeping 70  
 Inviolate the maiden state, by outrage opened  
 stand,  
 So all the multitudinous seas in one tide-race on-  
 sweeping  
 Will roll their waters all in vain for cleansing, when  
 foul murder's stain  
 Hath once incarnadined the hand.

(Epode.)

And I—the Gods have crushed me in the fall  
 Of my far-off war-leaguered home,  
 Have haled me from my fathers' house, a thrall,  
 Unto an evil doom.

And I must brook the brutal recklessness—  
 My life is not mine to control—  
 Which calls injustice justice, must suppress 80  
 The loathing of my soul.

And I, to hide my tears, must veil mine head,  
 Weeping the fate of my true chief,  
 A glory ruined ; and my heart seems dead,  
 All frost-benumbed by grief.

## ELECTRA.

Ye handmaid-thralls, the palace-garnishers,  
 Since ye with me in this our suppliant-train  
 Are joined, be touching this my counsellors :—  
 When on his grave I shed these funeral bowls,  
 Offenceless how shall I invoke my sire ?  
 Shall I say, ' This from loving wife I bear  
 To her loved lord '—*my mother being that wife ?* 90  
 I dare not this : I know not what to say,  
 While on my father's grave this draught I pour.  
 Or shall I say this, after all men's wont—  
 ' Oh grant thou fair return to those who send  
 These wreaths—*ay, some gift worthy of their crimes ?* '  
 Or in unhonoured silence, even as died  
 My father, shedding these for earth to drink,  
 Step back, as who casts out pollution, dash  
 The bowl to earth with unreverted eyes ?  
 O friends, be ye my counsellors herein ; 100  
 For in yon halls have we one common hate.



For dread of none hide aught your hearts within :  
Fate's ordinance awaiteth both the free  
And him that 'neath another's hand is thrall.  
Speak, if thou hast aught better than my words.

CHORUS.

Revering as an altar thy sire's tomb  
I will speak, for thou biddest, all mine heart.

ELECTRA.

Speak, as thou reverencest my father's grave.

CHORUS.

Pouring, speak solemn words for loyal souls.

ELECTRA.

And who be these whom of my friends I name ? 110

CHORUS.

Thyself first ; whoso hates Aegisthus next.

ELECTRA.

For me and thee, then, thus shall I invoke ?

CHORUS.

This with thyself rests to discern and judge.

ELECTRA.

Whom then beside do I count for one with us ?

CHORUS.

Think on Orestes, though afar he be.

ELECTRA.

Well said : most meet thine admonition is.

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CHORUS.

Then on that murder think ; and for the guilty—

ELECTRA.

What shall I pray ? Instruct mine ignorance.

CHORUS.

That one—God—mortal—may against them come—

ELECTRA.

As judge or as avenger, wouldst thou say ? 120

CHORUS.

Say plainly, ‘ One to render death for death.’

ELECTRA.

Nay, but were such prayer righteous in Heaven’s sight ?

CHORUS.

*Not righteous !*—to requite foul wrongs on foes ?

ELECTRA.

*(Going forward to the grave).*

Great Herald of the Lords of Heaven and Hell,  
Help, Hermes of the Shades ! O summon me,  
To hear my prayers, the Gods of Underworld,  
The awful Watchers o’er my father’s house,  
And earth herself, which brings all things to birth,  
Which nurtures, and takes back their increase—thus !

*(She pours from the bowl).*

I, pouring these drink-offerings to the dead,  
I, calling on my sire, cry, ‘ Pity me 130  
And dear Orestes ! How shall we win home ?  
For outcasts are we now ; we are chattels sold

By our own mother ; her price, a paramour !—  
 Aegisthus, who conspired to spill thy life !  
 I am but as a slave, and from his rights  
 Exiled Orestes lives ; they arrogantly  
 Are in the fruit of thy toils wantoning.  
 Oh, I implore thee, let Orestes come  
 Hither with fortune fair ! Hear, father, hear !  
 And to me grant a heart more virtuous far       140  
 Than is my mother's, and a hand more pure.  
 These prayers for us : but for our foes I pray  
 That thine avenger, father, may appear,  
 And that thy murderers righteously may die.  
 Thus I confront the sinners' wicked prayer :  
 I imprecate this curse upon their heads.  
 For us, O send these boons to the upper world !  
 So help Gods, Earth, and Justice victory-armed !'  
 Thus pray I, pouring these drink-offerings.  
 Now rain ye flowers of lamentation down       150  
 Upon the dirge ye chant for him, the dead.

## CHORUS.

Shed ye your tears ! like the rain let them fall  
     Spilt for the life of our lord which is spilt,  
 Shed on this grave-mound, the gateless wall  
 That shuts earth's evil and good from our lord,  
     Shed to wash out the pollution of guilt  
 That were brought with his slayer's libation out-  
     poured.  
     Hear, O dread lord ! From the darkness that  
     lies—  
     Woe's me and alas !—on thy spirit's eyes  
     Hear ! Let a strong spear-champion rise,       160  
 Rise to deliver thine house, whose hand

Shall strain the shaft on the Norland bow  
With the strength of the War-god, shall close with  
the foe,  
And thrust to the hilt the brand !

ELECTRA.

*(Returning from the grave).*

Now hath my sire the draught that earth hath  
drunk :—  
But hear what strange tale from the grave I bring.

CHORUS.

Say on—mine heart for terror fluttereth.

ELECTRA.

This severed tress—I saw it on the grave !

CHORUS.

Hair of what man or what deep-girded maid ?

ELECTRA. [170

A thing soon guessed : there's none but might divine.

CHORUS.

Old am I, yet from youth I fain would learn.

ELECTRA.

None living could have shorn such hair—save one.

CHORUS.

Nay, foes are they who should with shorn hair mourn.

ELECTRA.

This hair in gloss and hue is passing like—

CHORUS.

Unto what tresses ? This I fain would learn.

ELECTRA.

To mine—to ours !—like sister-hair it shows.

CHORUS.

Ha !—can this be Orestes' secret gift ?

ELECTRA.

Exceeding like his curls doth it appear.

CHORUS.

Nay, hither how should he have dared to come ?

ELECTRA.

He shore, and sent, in homage to his sire. 180

CHORUS.

None the less weeping-ripe thy words make me,  
If never more his foot may touch this land !

ELECTRA.

O'er me too sweeps heart-surge of bitterness :  
I am stricken as by some deep-piercing shaft.  
Burst from mine eyes, long drained of tears, the drops  
Like thundercloud-outpourings after drought,  
As I behold this tress ! How can I dream  
That any Argive owned this lock, save one ?  
'Twas never she, the murderess, shore it off,  
My mother, she whose godless spirit of hate 190  
To her own children, hath no touch of mother !  
And I, oh could I but claim this outright,  
This bright thing, for Orestes, best-beloved  
Of men—ah, 'tis but hope that smiles on me !

Ah, that it had a messenger's glad voice !  
Then, swayed no more 'twixt tide and tide of thought,  
Then might I with sure knowledge spurn this tress,  
As being severed from an enemy's head,  
Or as my kindred might it mourn with me  
Gracing this grave and honouring my sire. 200  
Ah, but the Gods to whom I cry know all,  
Know in what tempests, like men on the seas,  
We toss. If fate ordain that we escape,  
From this small seed a noble stock may spring.  
But lo, here footmarks be, a second sign !—  
Yea, human footprints—like unto mine own—  
Yea, here be twain, the outlines as of feet,—  
His own and of his fellow-wayfarer !  
The heels, the tendons' impress measured—thus—  
With mine own footprints tally, line for line. 210  
O travail-throes, O wilderment of soul !

*Enter Orestes.*

ORESTES.

Pray thou—first thanking Heaven for one prayer  
Fulfilled—that all the rest may be vouchsafed.

ELECTRA.

Now what by Heaven's grace have I attained ?

ORESTES.

Thou see'st him whom but now thou prayedst to see.

ELECTRA.

On whom call I, O thou who know'st mine heart ?

ORESTES.

I know Orestes is thine heart's adored.

ELECTRA.

And what prayer answered, prithee, do I see?

ORESTES.

Lo, I am he : seek none more dear than me.

ELECTRA.

Stranger, wouldst weave a net of guile for me? 220

ORESTES.

Then were my plot devised against myself.

ELECTRA.

Nay, thou wouldst mock me in my misery!

ORESTES.


In mine own misery, if in thine, 'twere done.

ELECTRA.

Art thou Orestes? Must I name thee thus?

ORESTES.

Thou seest my very self, yet doubttest me.  
Thou sawest this lock, token of mourning love—  
Thine heart's wings beat to think thou sawest me.  
The print of mine own footsteps didst thou scan  
Tokening thy brother's form matched with thine own.  
Look on this lock, lay hair to severed hair : 230  
And see this web, the work of thine own hand,  
The shuttle-beats, the wild things there portrayed . .  
Nay, curb thyself, be not for joy distraught :  
I know our near kin are our bitter foes.



## CHORUS.

O dearest treasure of thy father's house,  
Hope of a saviour-seed watered with tears !  
Thy might shall win thee back thy father's home !

## ELECTRA.

Dear presence, dear with dues of fourfold ties  
To me ! I may, I must, as father hail  
Thee : and all love that round a mother clings      240  
Is thine—most righteously is *she* abhorred—  
And round that sister pitilessly slain !  
My heart's one trust—O brother, glory mine,  
Thou only ! . . Strength and Justice, with one more,  
Zeus, of all mightiest, be on our side !

## ORESTES.

Zeus, Zeus, be thou beholder of our cause !  
Look on that eagle-father's orphan brood—  
Of him who died amidst the knots and coils  
Of that fell viper. Fatherless be these  
And famine-wasted, being all too weak      250  
Home to the nest to bring the father's prey.  
So mayest thou behold us, me and her,  
Electra, children of a sire bereft,  
Both suffering one banishment from home.  
If thou leave these to perish, brood of him  
Who with high honour did thee sacrifice,  
Whose hand like his shall pay thee banquet-dues ?  
Lo, if thou leave thine eagle's brood to die,  
Thou wilt have none to bear men tokens true,  
Nor, if this royal stock should wither all,      260  
Shall this thine altars serve on hecatomb-days.



Foster it, so to greatness shalt thou lift  
From dust the house that now seems wholly fallen.

## CHORUS.

O children, saviours of your father's hearth,  
Keep silence, younglings, lest one haply hear,  
And for mere babbling's sake report all this  
Unto our masters :—may I see them yet  
Dead on the pyre mid spiriting flame of pitch !

## ORESTES.

Me verily Loxias' mighty oracle  
Will fail not : through this peril he bade press,     270  
Cheering me on, and through my fevered heart  
Breathing deep mutterings of a storm of doom,  
If I pursued not my sire's murderers,  
Bidding me, fierce as wild bull, slay the slayers  
With vengeance by no blood-gild to be stayed—  
Yea, said, except I did it, mine own soul  
Should in fierce agonies atone for all.  
For He—who shows men salves from earth that  
    spring  
For ills malign—these plagues He promised me :  
Tetters that with fierce pangs crawl o'er the flesh, 280  
Eating away its life and sap of youth,  
While white hairs sprout all o'er the blasted skin ;  
Yea, spake of onslaughts of the Avenging Fiends—  
Ripe fruit whereof my father's blood was seed—  
The shaft of darkness shot from the underworld  
By suppliants murdered of their nearest kin ;  
Madness, and phantom terrors of the night,  
Which I, through darkness staring, plain should see,  
Would harass, would torment their victim, till,

Torn by their brazen scourge, he is driven from  
men : 290

And such lost wretches neither in men's feasts  
Have part, nor in the Gods' drink-offerings,  
From altars by a father's unseen wrath  
Banned : such none dare receive, none dwell with  
them.

They die at last the outcast's friendless death  
By wasting doom to ghastly skeletons worn.  
Shall I put no faith in such oracles ?  
Yea, though faith fail, yet must the deed be done :  
For many promptings to one end conspire—  
The God's behest, my great grief for my sire, 300  
Yea, and the grim constraint of penury—  
That I let not this people world-renowned,  
Who overthrew Troy by their heroism,  
Be thus two women's serfs—for womanlike  
His heart is : if not, let him bide the test !

*ORESTES and ELECTRA take their stand on either  
side of the tomb : the chorus group themselves round  
it.*

THE INCANTATION CHANT.

CHORUS.

Destinies, Mighty Ones, grant that from Zeus may  
the issue betide  
Even as Justice requireth, who now is arrayed on  
our side.  
' Ever the tongue of hate shall the tongue of hate re-  
quite : 310  
Aye for the stroke of murder the stroke of murder  
shall smite.'

Justice exacting her dues cries ringing-voiced this  
law.

'Doers must suffer'—so sayeth the immemorial saw.

ORESTES. (Str. 1.)

What can I say, what do, O hapless father,  
So to waft down a light from 'neath our sky,  
Down to the narrow bed where thou dost lie,  
Piercing the folds of gloom that round thee  
gather ? 320

Is it not so, that this our dirge, that singeth  
Glories achieved, not all unwelcome ringeth  
From these last Atreids, at thy doors who cry ?

CHORUS. (Str. 2.)

My son, the spirit of the slain  
No ravening jaws of death-bale fire  
Destroy : he flasheth forth again,  
Long after, lightnings of his ire.  
Over the dead the keen is pealed ;  
And lo, his murderer stands revealed.  
When fathers foully butchered die, 330  
The wail for justice, shrilling high,  
Follows the track of wrong to exact the penalty.

ELECTRA. (Ant. 1.)

Hearken, O father, then, as with strong crying  
We yet again weep forth the orphans' pain.  
Lo, on thy tomb we stand, thy children twain :  
Heavenward ascends our lamentation's sighing.  
Suppliants and exiles both thy grave hath found us !  
Ah, is this well ?—are evils not all round us ?  
Wrestle we not with ruin all in vain ?

CHORUS. (Str. 3)

Yet out of all this God, so he be willing, 340  
Shall waken shouts hereafter happy-thrilling ;  
And, for the dirge that o'er the grave-mound rings,  
A triumph-chant shall hail in halls of kings  
The dear one who to us deliverance brings.

ORESTES. (Str. 4)

But ah, that 'neath Ilium's walls,  
My sire, by a Lycian foe  
Spear-stabbed, thou hadst been laid low !  
Then renown hadst thou left in thine halls,  
And hadst made in the city's ways  
The life of thy children a praise ; 350  
And a tomb in the land oversea  
Had a great host toiled to raise  
For their chieftain's memorial ; and we  
Had been comforted for thee.

CHORUS. (Ant. 2)

How had the love there welcomed him  
Of old friends fallen gloriously !  
Yea, in that nether kingdom dim  
He had towered august in majesty,  
Approved a minister to stand  
Before the Lords of Shadowland,  
Who, while he lived, was overlord  
O'er kings who accomplish fate's award 360  
By sceptered sway of hearts, by battle-breaking sword.

ELECTRA. (Ant. 4)

Yet I would not that thou, my sire,  
With other thy folk, unto whom  
The stroke of the spear dealt doom,

Before Ilium hadst lain on the pyre  
 Hard by Skamander's flow !  
 Nay, rather that even so  
     By their own kin slain amid peace  
 Were those who have laid thee low,  
     That far-away dwellers at ease                   370  
     Might hear of the doom of these.

CHORUS.                   (*Mesode.*)

Ah child, above earth's best fortune were this  
     That thou namest : more precious were this than  
     gold :  
 Not the dwellers in Fairyland know such bliss !  
     Well mayst thou—the heart's wish lightly is told.  
 Yet oh, I hear it—the heavy sound  
     Of the twin-lashed scourge of God draweth nigh !  
 Ay, the helpers of these lie 'neath the ground ;  
 But the hateful usurpers' hands are polluted  
 With blood : ere long shall their power be disrooted ;  
     For now with the children is victory !

ELECTRA.                   (*Str. 5*)

Thy boding triumphant is in mine hearing                   380  
     Thrilling keen as the shaft that hath leapt from a  
     bow !  
 Zeus, Zeus sends up from the realms below  
 Retribution that long hath delayed its appearing  
     To light on the felon hand all-daring—  
     Yea, on that mother to fall unsparing !

CHORUS.                   (*Str. 6*)

O might it be mine, o'er the murderer foeman  
     Murdered, to chant the triumph-song,

As he burns on the pine-logs, and over the woman,  
 The traitress, to hymn the avengèd wrong!  
 For why should I hide how the vengeance-vision  
 Aye hovers before me? Mine heart's prow forward  
 Driveth; and bitter as blasts from norward [390  
 Doth wrath's wind speed it on hate's stern mission.

ORESTES. (Ant. 5)

Ah, when shall Zeus, in omnipotence baring  
 His arm, reveal him the sinners' foe,  
 Cleaving their heads with avenging blow?  
 Then shall loyalty reign in a land well-faring.  
 I cry for the righting of wrong: O hear me,  
 Earth!—Underworld Powers, for mine help be near  
 me!

CHORUS. (Ant. 3)

A Law saith, 'Murder-drops of blood-libation 400  
 On earth spilt, cry for blood in expiation.'  
 The Avenging Sprite shrieks, hastening Havoc on  
 Which brings from graves of men dead long ago  
 Ruin to crown the work of ruin done.

ELECTRA. (Str. 7)

How long, how long? Lords of the Shadow-regions,  
 Look on us! Mighty Curses of the Dead,  
 Look on us, banned our home and hard-bestead,  
 Last of the line that owned this land's allegiance!  
 Whither may one turn, Zeus?—is all hope fled?

CHORUS. (Ant. 6)

Thrilling and throbbing mine heart hath hearkened  
 Unto thy wail: one while I despair, [410  
 And I feel my spirit within me darkened  
 As I list to thy passion of helpless prayer.

And anon cometh Hope, and she smileth in scorning  
 Mine anguish away, bringing strength and uplifting  
 Of soul, and the clouds from her face far-drifting  
 Reveal her, a glory, a splendour of morning.

ORESTES. (*Ant.* 7.)

What shall we say, and err not? Dare we smother  
 Flames of our anguished wrath for that blood-  
     feast  
 Lapped by our dam?—O nay, 'twill ne'er be  
     eased. 420  
 Ay, and our heritage from that fierce mother  
 Is the wolf-spirit whose hate is not appeased.

CHORUS. (*Str.* 8.)

I have lifted my voice in the Aryan keen, as a Kissian  
     wailing  
 I shrill my lament, and mine arms may ye mark  
     tossed to and fro,  
 As my hard-clenched hands from above are in swift  
     succession hailing  
 On mine all-wretched head, till it rings with their  
     buffetings, blow upon blow.

ELECTRA. (*Str.* 9.)

Mother all-reckless in hate, thou didst cause like a foe  
     to be borne 430  
 Unto burial a king unattended, a husband whom none  
     would mourn,  
 Whom all unlamented thou daredst to thrust 'neath  
     the earth as in scorn!

ORESTES. (Str. 10.)

Thou tellest our utterest shame, woe's me!—yet the  
shameful despite,  
If the Gods will but help, if mine hands may avail,  
will I surely requite!  
*Then* I care not though I die, having thrust her from  
life and from light.

CHORUS. (Ant. 10.)

Hacked limb from limb was his corse, know thou!—  
as she dealt with the slain, 440  
So did she deal with his son, that thy life should be  
one long pain  
Of exile. The pangs and the shame of thy sire—is  
their tale not plain?

ELECTRA. (Ant. 8.)

Thou tellest the fate of my sire:—me far from him  
then were they keeping  
Flouted and scorned: like some pestilent hound was  
I kennelled apart.  
Think ye I laughed as I poured out the tear-drops,  
with floods of weeping  
Wailing in secret?—O hear it and grave it upon  
thine heart! 450

CHORUS. (Ant. 9.)

Draw it in deep through thine ears with the silent  
footfall of thought.  
Such was the past: for the future let thy resolve  
burn hot:  
Thou must enter the lists with a spirit to temper of  
steel fire-wrought.



ORESTES. (Str. 11.)

Father, I cry on thee; now be the ally of them that love thee!

ELECTRA.

Yea, and I lift up my voice, while the flood of my weeping flows.

CHORUS.

We shriek, as partakers with these, our invocation above thee.

Come to the light, and give ear: be our ally against our foes! 460

ORESTES. (Ant. 11.)

Let our might come to grips with their might, our right of their right make assaying!

ELECTRA.

Accomplish, ye Gods, our desire, as Justice pronounceth her doom!

CHORUS.

Trembling on me layeth hold, as I hearken the spell of your praying!

Long retribution hath tarried, but now at our prayers let it come!

O dread death-grapple wherein these kindred close!

O tuneless music of ruin's blood-stained blows!

O lamentable pangs past all enduring!

O anguish of the wound that baffles curing! 470

Yet of these shall the wound of the house find staunching now,

Yea, and from none of a stranger line, I trow :  
These, these shall pace the grim feud's path blood-  
haunted.

Lo, to the Nether Gods this hymn is chanted.

Hear, Blessed Ones, deep under earth though ye be,  
This our appeal, and your help send ye  
Of your grace to the children, for victory !

ORESTES.

Father, who diedst in unkingly wise,  
Grant to my prayer the lordship of thine halls ! 480

ELECTRA.

Father, I too beseech thee—lo, I am sold  
To Aegisthus : let me 'scape that deep reproach !

ORESTES.

So shall for thee the feast of use and wont  
Be established : else, where feast the dead Kings, thou  
Wilt sit shamed, banned from earth's burnt-offerings'  
steam !

ELECTRA.

From these old halls, of my rich heritage  
Bridal libations will I bring to thee,  
Yea, above all else honour this thy tomb.

ORESTES.

Earth, send my sire to captain me in fight !

ELECTRA.

Persephonê, crown him with fair victory ! 490

ORESTES.

Think, O my father, on the bath of death !

ELECTRA.

Think on that strange net which they cast o'er thee !

ORESTES.

In gyves not brazen, father, wast thou trapped,—

ELECTRA.

But foully snared in palls of treachery.

ORESTES.

Father, shall these reproaches rouse thee not ?

ELECTRA.

Wilt not upraise for love of us thine head ?

ORESTES.

Send Justice, in fair fight to champion us,  
Or let us trap them, as they thee, by guile,  
If thou, once vanquished, wouldst in turn o'ercome.

ELECTRA.


And hear this, father, this our last appeal :                   500  
As on thy tomb thou seest thy nestlings crouched,  
Compassionate thy daughter and thy son.

ORESTES.

And blot not out in these all Pelops' seed ;  
For thus thou art not dead, though thou have died.

ELECTRA.

For children keep alive a man's renown,  
Though he be dead, as floats bear up the net,  
Up-buoying from the abyss the flaxen line.



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ORESTES.

Hearken ; for thy sake ring these wailings down :  
Thyself art saved by granting this our prayer.

CHORUS.

Full measure hath this prayer ye have lengthened  
out 510  
To grace the tomb, the fate unwailed before.  
The rest now, since thy soul is thus resolved,  
Straight do, and put thy fortune to the proof.

ORESTES.

That will I : yet 'tis pertinent to ask  
Why sent she the libation, for what cause  
Rues she too late a mischief nought may cure ?  
To an undiscerning dead man was it sent,  
This sorry boon ?—I cannot deem it so.  
Yea, the gift falls so far short of the offence !  
' Though one pour out his all for one man's blood 520  
To atone, it is lost labour,' saith the saw.  
Tell, if thou knowest, this : I fain would learn.

CHORUS.

I know it, son, for I was there. By dreams  
And haunting terrors of the night appalled  
That godless woman sent these offerings.

ORESTES.

Heard ye her dream, to tell it certainly ?

CHORUS.

She dreamed she bare a serpent, herself saith.

ORESTES.

And the tale's end and consummation—what ?

CHORUS.

In swaddling bands she lulled it, like a babe.

ORESTES.

And what food did the new-born monster crave ? 530

CHORUS.

Herself gave to it in her dream the breast.

ORESTES.

Did it not wound her dug, the loathly thing ?

CHORUS.

Yea, with the milk it sucked forth clots of blood.

ORESTES.

Ha ! not for nought !—a vision of a man !

CHORUS.

Scared, from her sleep she sprang with one wild  
shriek :

Then for our mistress' help leapt into light  
Lamps many through the halls, erst darkness-  
quenched.

So sends she these sepulchral offerings,  
As who hoped these should charm away her doom.

ORESTES.

I pray this earth, I pray my father's tomb, 540  
That this her dream may be in me fulfilled.  
Right well, I judge, doth it agree thereto :  
For if the serpent from the self-same womb  
Proceeding, in my swaddling bands was swathed,  
And mouthed the self-same breast that nurtured me,  
And mingled with a clot of blood the milk,

And she for dread thereof in anguish shrieked,  
She surely must, who nursed that portent dread,  
By violence die ; and I, her serpent I,  
Shall slay her, even as this dream foreshows. 550

## CHORUS.

Herein I choose thee for my soothsayer.  
So be it ! For what follows, tell thy friends  
Both what to do and what to leave undone.

## ORESTES.

'Tis soon said. Let my sister pass within :  
And I beseech you that ye hide my plot,  
That they who slew a prince by treachery  
By treachery may in this our net be snared,  
And so die even as Loxias foretold,  
Phœbus the King, true prophet from of old.  
In stranger's guise I, garbed at all points so, 560  
Will to yon outer gate with this man come,  
Pylades, guest and ally of our house.  
And we will utter both Parnassian speech,  
Feigning the accent of the Phocian tongue.  
And if no porter with blithe welcoming  
Receive us—since curse-haunted is the house—  
There will we tarry till the folk, that pass  
The halls, thereat shall marvel, and shall say :  
' Why thrusts he back the suppliant from his doors,  
If in the land Ægisthus is, and knows ? ' 570  
And I, if once I pass the threshold-stone,  
And find him throned upon my father's seat—  
Or if he come and look me in the face,  
Yea, cast his eyes upon me, be thou sure,  
Ere he can say, ' Whence comes the stranger ? ' dead

I'll lay him, plunging through him the swift sword.  
 The Erinnys then, in slaughter stinted not,  
 Shall quaff her third draught—undiluted blood !  
 Now therefore, sister, watch well all within,  
 That this may fall with our aims consonant. 580  
 And you I bid to bear a silent tongue :  
 Keep peace where needeth, and in season speak.  
 In all else, Hermes, be thou nigh to aid,  
 Speeding aright each venture of my sword.

[*Exeunt Orestes, Pylades, and Electra.*]

CHORUS. (Str. 1)

Many a horror, fell and dread,  
 Great All-mother Earth hath bred ;  
 'Twixt the deep sea's mighty arms  
 Man-destroying monster-swarms ;  
 Sudden torches flashed on high,  
 Flowers amid dark fields of sky ; 590  
 Fearsome winged and fourfoot things,  
 And the tempest's fury-wings.

(Ant. 1)

But the spirit fierce and fell  
 Maddening man, ah, who can tell ?—  
 Maddening women reckless-souled—  
 Tell the passion uncontrolled  
 Aye with human ruin joined—  
 Loveless lust of female kind  
 That doth wedlock's tree disroot 600  
 In the man as in the brute ?

(Str. 2)

Let him ponder, whose wit not aimless,  
 As a bird wide-wandering, flies,  
 What purpose did cruel-shameless  
 Thestius' daughter devise—

A purpose of fire, for the casting  
Down on the red hearth-flame  
Of the brand foredoomed twin-lasting  
With her son's life, even as he came  
Forth of the womb sudden-crying ; 610  
For, while yet it abode unconsumed,  
He should see not the day of dying  
Unto all men foredoomed.

(*Ant. 2*)

A hate shall she too be in story,  
Even Scylla of blood-stained hand  
Who destroyed the Cretans' glory  
For love of the foe of her land.  
For the necklace of gold she lusted,  
The gift that Minos bore,  
And the lock wherein Nisus trusted,  
The tress immortal, she shore  
From his head—O shameless-hearted !—  
As he breathed mistrustless of doom 620  
In sleep—his soul waked, and upstarted,  
For Hermes said, ' Come ! '

(*Str. 3*)

Ah no, but these agonies olden  
Of sin may in no wise compare  
With the curse in yon halls enfolden,  
With the union of horror there.  
O adulterous, treacherous woman  
Who plotted the death of her lord,  
The champion dreaded of foemen  
For the ruining wrath of his sword !  
Ah, the hearth where runs not riot  
The flame of passion, the grace



Of a spirit meek and quiet  
In woman, I praise. 630

(*Ant.* 3)

Nay, of crimes 'tis the Lesbian beareth  
The palm ; ever loathèd it is  
And bewailed : still one compareth  
Each ghastliest horror with this.  
That race that with sin's defiling  
Was tainted, hated and banned  
Of the Gods, a scorn and reviling  
Long since perished out of the land.  
None honoureth, none relenteth  
Unto that which the high Gods curse.  
I compare them—yea, Justice consenteth—  
Their sin and hers.

(*Str.* 4)

But the keen-whetted sword maketh severance  
Of the breath-ways of life, deep thrust 640  
By Justice's hand ; for the Right  
Transgressed is not spurned out of sight  
By them that would do despite  
Unto Zeus, to deny him reverence  
Overstepping the path of the just.

(*Ant.* 4)

Lo, the anvil of Justice is planted  
Firm, and the swordsmith Fate  
Is forging the Sword of Doom :  
The deep-brooding Erinnys brings home  
The child Retribution, of whom 650  
Shall the blood-pollution, that haunted  
The house, be avenged thus late.

*The scene changes to the front of the palace.*

ORESTES.

Ho! gate-ward, list my knocking at the door!  
Who is within?—ho, gate-ward, once again!  
Lo, the third time I cry, ‘Come forth the house!’—  
If great Aegisthus is the stranger’s friend.

DOOR-KEEPER.

Ho there! I hear! Of what land art thou?—  
whence?

ORESTES.

Bear word unto the masters of the house;  
For ’tis to these I come, and tidings bring—  
Nay, haste thee, for the dusky car of night      660  
Speeds on, and time it is that wayfarers  
Drop anchor in hospitable hostelry.  
Let one who hath authority come forth—  
The mistress—nay, her lord were seemlier;  
For then for shamefastness words falter not  
In mid-speech: man with confidence may speak  
To man, and show clear tokens for his tale.

*Enter Klytemnestra.*

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Strangers, say whatso needeth. Here have we  
All that beseemeth such a house as this—  
Warm baths, beds, all that charms away the pain 670  
Of toil, observance of all courtesy.  
If aught of weightier import needs to do,  
This were for men, with whom we will confer.

## ORESTES.

A Daulian stranger I, from Phocis come.  
 As, bearing mine own needments, on I fared  
 To Argos—whither now my feet have won—  
 A man I knew not met me who knew not him,  
 And asked my way, and told his own, and named him  
 Strophius the Phocian, in our conference, saying :  
 ‘ Since thou to Argos goest in any wise, 680  
 Say to his parents—mark with diligent heed—  
 This—“ Dead Orestes is : ” forget it not.  
 If then it please his friends to bring him home,  
 Or in a strange land, exiled evermore,<sup>1</sup>  
 To bury, bring back word as they command ;  
 For now in brazen sides the funeral urn  
 Hideth his dust, his dues of mourning paid.’  
 So heard I, so I tell : if now I speak  
 Unto his house’s heads and to his kin,  
 I know not ; but it fits his sire should know.<sup>2</sup> 690

## KLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah me ! thy tale our utter ruin tells !  
 Curse of this house, O wrestler none may quell,  
 Aimer at prey from thy range well withdrawn,  
 Archer whose bow unerring slays from far,  
 Thou stripp’st me bare of dear ones—hapless me !  
 And now Orestes—ah, so wisely, he deemed,  
 He kept his foot clear of destruction’s slough !—  
 Him, Hope the Healer, born to purge these halls  
 Of the Fiends’ Revel, him thou writ’st down—thus !

1. Another interpretation : ‘ evermore our guest.’

2. To the speaker, in his assumed character, Orestes is a mere name. He does not know his family history, and takes for granted that his father is alive.

## ORESTES.

In sooth, fain had I to such princely hosts      700  
As bearer of glad tidings made me known,  
And my guest-welcome so had earned : for what  
Is kindlier than the tie of guest and host ?  
Yet to my thought it seemed an impious deed  
To do not this sad service to his friends  
When I had promised, and was greeted guest.

## KLYTEMNESTRA.

None the less worthy thee shall be thy welcome,  
Nor less the house shall hold thee for its friend.  
Another had brought the tidings, hadst thou not.  
But now 'tis time that guests who all day long      710  
Have journeyed far, be graced with service meet.  
(*To steward*). Lead him to our guest-chambers  
dight for men,  
With these his thralls and fellow-wayfarers ;  
There be their tendance as beseems our house.  
This do, as who shall give account to me.  
But I will tell this to the house's lord ;  
And—for we are not all bereft of friends—  
We will take counsel touching this mischance.  
[*Exeunt.*]

## CHORUS.

When, O ye handmaids leal to the house, shall we lift  
up on high      720  
Strength of our voices, to shout for Orestes the good-  
speed cry ?  
Mighty Ones, Earth, and thou Grave-mound which  
over the body art laid

Of a king, of a captain of ships, now hearken, now  
 come to our aid !  
 Now is it time, full time is it now, that with us be  
 allied  
 Suasion of Guile, and that Underworld Hermes of  
 Darkness be guide  
 To him who shall enter the strife which the slaughtering  
 sword shall decide.

*Enter Nurse.*

Meseems the stranger bringeth grief with him : 730  
 Lo, yonder weeping comes Orestes' nurse.  
 Whither away, Kilissa, through the gates ?  
 No hireling sorrow fareth forth with thee.

NURSE.

Our lady biddeth summon with all speed  
 Ægisthus to her guests, that plainlier,  
 As man from man, he may enquire of them  
 Touching these tidings. From her household-thralls  
 Brows lowering veiled the laughter in her eyes,  
 Hiding her joy for what hath happened so well  
 For her, but for this house all-wretchedly, 740  
 By this the strangers' tale—alas, too plain !  
 Ah, glad at heart shall he be, hearing this,  
 Soon as he learns the story. Woe is me !  
 How all the mingled troubles of the past,  
 So hard to bear, that here in Atreus' halls  
 Befell, wrung in my breast this heart of mine !  
 But never pang like this have I endured.  
 All ills beside with patience still I bore :  
 But dear Orestes, love-load on my heart,

Whom from his mother I received and nursed— 750  
Oft his shrill nightly summons broke my sleep :  
Ay, many a fruitless hardship I endured :  
For the unreasoning babe, like some young beast,  
Sooth, must ye rear with mother-wit for guide ;  
For no speech hath the child in swaddling-clothes  
To tell of hunger, thirst, or nature's need ;  
And straight the young frame heeds the imperious  
call.

Forewarned hereof, yet oft-times caught, I wot,  
Unwares, 'twas mine to cleanse his swathing-bands ;  
So had the nurse the fuller's office too. 760  
Such twofold handicraft I took on me  
When I received Orestes for his sire.  
And now I hear—woe's me !—that he is dead.  
And to the man I go, who hath defiled  
This house, and who shall hear this tale with joy !

CHORUS.

How furnished, prithee, doth she bid him come ?

NURSE.

How ?—say it again, that I may understand.

CHORUS.

To come with guards encompassed, or alone ?

NURSE.

She bids him bring his spearman-retinue.

CHORUS.

Bear no such message to our hated lord ! 770  
Bid him alone come, and mistrustless hear,

Yea, come with all speed with a joyful mind.  
 'Crooked is set straight in the messenger's heart.'<sup>1</sup>

NURSE.

How now?—Art thou for these their tidings glad?

CHORUS.

What if Zeus turn to triumph this disaster?

NURSE.

How should he—and our hope Orestes dead?

CHORUS.

Not yet—this might the sorriest seer divine.<sup>2</sup>

NURSE.

What say'st thou? Know'st thou more than meets the  
 ear?

CHORUS.

Go, bear thy message. That enjoined thee, do.  
 The Gods take care for that for which they care. 780

NURSE.

Nay then, I go, and will obey thy words;  
 And by the Gods' grace may all good betide. [Exit.

CHORUS. (Str. 1)

Now in prayer to thee I call, Zeus Father, Lord of all

1. Understanding the line as a quotation of a bit of popular casuistry in favour of mental reservation.

2. Tucker interprets: 'As yet, 'twere no mean seer would vouch for this.' With this view accords the explanatory note of the scholiast—'He were an unerring seer who could assert this.'

The Gods Olympian, prosper us, who yearn to see  
the Right  
In triumph stand assured o'er the wrong so long  
endured.  
All my cry is but for justice, Zeus : protect him  
with thy might !

(*Str. 2*)

Ah, do thou, Zeus, of thy grace, but bring him face  
to face  
With his foes in yonder palace, in iniquity's strong-  
hold ; 790  
For, if thou exalt him high, he shall render joyfully  
Requital of thank-offerings twice and three times  
over told.

(*Ant. 1*)

Think on him thou heldest dear : ah, behold his scion  
here  
To a chariot yoked of peril :—O set his course a  
goal !  
Oh to see his rushing feet keeping time and measure  
meet,  
Straining down the course to victory, upheld by thy  
control !

(*Str. 3*)

Hearth-gods, who have your shrine where the house's  
treasures shine, 800  
Hear, all-propitious, hear ! Exact atonement for  
the blood  
Of men murdered long ago ! Lo, the murder old is  
grown ;  
No more within yon palace may it spawn a cursèd  
brood !



---

(*Mesode.*)

O Dweller in dark halls 'twixt thy chasm's massy  
walls,<sup>1</sup>

Vouchsafe the hero's house may now uplift its head  
once more, [810

May look with loyal eyes bright in the new sunrise  
From out the veil of darkness that hath hung its  
face before.

(*Ant.* 3)

Oh be Maia's Son allied, as right is, on our side,  
Who can speed an emprise onward like a ship  
before the wind,  
He who prompts the word that throws darkness o'er  
the eyes of foes,  
Till they stumble in the daylight whom his craft  
has stricken blind.

(*Str.* 4)

Then at last will we upraise for deliverance songs of  
praise, 820

And will banish all the wailing of the trembling  
chords of fear.

O then shall all be well ; and my gain, ah, who shall  
tell

When the curse is done away from them my heart  
holds dear ?

(*Ant.* 2)

O be stout of heart, my son, when the deed is to be  
done !

She will shriek to thee, ' My child ! ' so to paralyse  
thine hand :

---

1. Apollo, in his Delphian shrine in the rifted rock of  
Parnassus.

Then shout thy father's name o'er the deed his blood  
doth claim :

Then consummate the ruin wherein blameless thou  
dost stand. 830

(*Ant.* 4)

Thine be Perseus' heart, whose sword with monster-  
women warred,

When thou wrakest bitter vengeance for thy loved  
ones underground,

And for them on earth, to slake Ruin's blood-thirst  
for their sake,

And when the doom-deviser hath in thee destruction  
found.

*Enter Ægisthus.*

ÆGISTHUS.

Summoned by messenger express I come.

I hear how certain strangers hitherward

Faring, have brought us tidings nowise glad, 840

Orestes' death. To charge the house therewith

Were laying a terror-raining murder-load

On one yet gashed and festering with old wounds.

How shall I know that this is truth unfeigned ?

Is it but women's panic-struck report

That leaps like flame, and dies down leaving nought ?

What can ye tell, that I be certified ?

CHORUS.

We have heard—but pass thou in, and of thy guests

Make question. Nothing-worth are hearsay-tales

When man may question of a man himself. 850

## ÆGISTHUS.

Myself will see and sift the messenger,  
 Whether himself was there, and saw his death,  
 Or speaketh but from some vague rumour heard.  
 My mind's keen vision shall he not delude.

[Exit.

## CHORUS.

O Zeus, O Zeus, what shall I say, and where  
 Make a beginning with the vow and prayer?  
 How shall my words, with utmost loyal intent,  
 Rise to the height of this great argument?  
 Now are the keen blades, sped on murderous mission,  
 Bloodstained, at point to try the grim decision— 860  
 Perish shall Agamemnon's house, descending  
 Down into ruin utter and unending?  
 Or shall Orestes kindle a beacon-light  
 For freedom and the lawful rule of Right,  
 And hold his father's wealth of empery?  
 O mighty strife wherein with these two foes  
 He, sole avenger of the slain, shall close  
 In wrestle of death—for victory may it be!

ÆGISTHUS. (*within*)*Ah-h! woe is me!*

## CHORUS.

Ha!—hist!—the cry of one! 870  
 How goes it?—what in yon halls now is done?  
 Stand we aloof while this deed is achieved,  
 That men may hold us guiltless of these ills;  
 For the fight's issue is decided now.

*Enter Servant.*

SERVANT.

Alas and well-a-day for my dead lord !  
Woe and alas ! and thrice-alas I cry !  
Ægisthus is no more ! Fling wide the gates  
With all speed, and unbar the doors that keep  
The women's bowers !—There want young sinews  
here—

Not to defend him who is sped—what help ?      880  
Ho there !—I hail the deaf, and vainly cry  
To sleepers ! Whither is Klytemnestra gone ?  
What doth she ?—Now is her neck like to fall—  
'Neath Justice' sword—the edge hangs imminent !

*Enter Klytemnestra.*

KLYTEMNESTRA.

What now ? What clamour wak'st thou in the halls ?

MESSENGER.

The dead are slaying the living !—*this* I say.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah me ! I understand thy riddling speech !  
By guile we perish, even as we slew !  
Give me—quick, give a warrior-quelling axe :  
Let see if now I shall prevail or fall ;      890  
For to this desperate issue am I come.

*Enter Orestes.*

ORESTES.

'Thee too I seek : for him, it is enough.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Ah me !—thou art dead, Ægisthus best-beloved !

ORESTES.

Lov'st thou the man ?—thou in one grave with him  
Shalt lie. In death shalt thou forsake him never.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Forbear, my son ! Revere this, O my child,  
This breast, whereon thou oft hast slumbered, whence  
Thy lips the while drew life-sustaining milk.

ORESTES.

Pylades, must my reverence spare my mother ?

PYLADES.

Where then were Loxias' sun-clear oracles                   900  
Uttered at Pytho, and thy plighted oaths ?  
Rather have all the world thy foes than Heaven.

ORESTES.

I adjudge thee victor : thou exhortest well.  
Come : by his very side will I slay thee.  
Living, thou held'st him dearer than my sire :  
Sleep with him in thy death, since thou dost love  
This man, and hatest whom thou ought'st to love.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

I nursed thee—O let me grow old with thee !

ORESTES.

My father's murderess !—shalt thou dwell with me ?

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Fate was accomplice in those deeds, my child.   910

ORESTES.

Yea, Fate the while for thee prepared this doom.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Nought dost thou dread a mother's curse, O child?

ORESTES.

My mother cast me forth to misery.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, to a home of friends she sped thee forth.

ORESTES.

Twice sold was I, a freeborn father's son!

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Sold?—and what price did I receive for thee?

ORESTES.

I shame to utter its reproach to thee!

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Thy father's sins—spare not to tell them, too! ~

ORESTES.

Sitter at home, accuse not him who toils!

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Hard is the lot of wives deserted, child. \ 920

ORESTES.

They sit at home, and by their lord's toil live.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Thou seemest set to slay, O son, thy mother!

ORESTES.

Thou wilt be slayer of thyself, not I.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

See to it—'ware the mother's Vengeance-hounds!

ORESTES.

How should I 'scape my father's, if I spared?

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Living, I wail as to a tomb—in vain!

ORESTES.

My father's fate wafts unto thee this doom.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Woe's me, who bore this serpent and who nursed!

ORESTES.

Prophet indeed was that thy dream-born fear—  
Unnatural murderess, die the unnatural death! 930

*[Exit, dragging Klytemnestra within.]*

CHORUS.

O but I wail the misery of these twain!  
Yet, since to blood-guilt's topmost peak hath climbed  
Hapless Orestes, rather this I choose  
Than that the house's hope in ruin fell.

(*Str. 1*)

On the children of Priam came heavy-handed  
Justice, exacting the penalty-pain;  
So to Agamemnon's halls came the banded  
Leash of lions, the war-gods twain;<sup>1</sup>

1. Orestes and Pylades.

And the exile who followed the Pythian vision, [940  
Whom a God sped forth on his vengeance-mission—  
He hath come to his own : all, all doth he gain !

(*Str.* 2)

Raise gladsome acclaim for the house of our masters  
Escaped from the curse, from the spoiling of wasters,  
Escaped from the path of an evil fate  
Whereon the defilers dragged it so late !

(*Ant.* 1)

Down swoopeth the guileful Retribution  
On the caitiff who shrinks from open fight ;  
But her champion's hand mid the strife's confusion  
She grasped—Zeus' Daughter, whom Justice and  
Right

We mortals name who fitly before her 950  
Bend, with acceptable prayers to adore her—  
And the breath of her wrath did the foe's strength  
blight.

(*Str.* 3)

So hath Loxias, Lord of Parnassus, striven,  
From where on its crest is his mighty shrine,  
With her unto whom long respite was given,  
Who at last is enmeshed in the net divine.  
O yea, on the Gods by their nature is laid  
A constraint, that the wicked they may not aid.  
It is meet to adore the Lords of Heaven, 960  
For at last upon us doth the dayspring shine.

(*Ant.* 2)

The curb from the lips of the thrall is taken !  
Lift up thine head, house long forsaken  
Of freedom ! Long, O long didst thou bend  
Crushed to the earth as it seemed without end.



(Ant. 3)

Time, all-fulfiller, in swift revolution

Shall come to the house, when far off flies

From the hearth of it banished all the pollution

By curse-dispelling sacrifice ;

And fair-faced fortunes and gracious-eyed

To the alien sojourners there shall betide 970

Once more, after all that long confusion :

Yea, at last upon us doth the dayspring rise !

*The scene opens, and Orestes is seen standing beside  
the bodies of Ægisthus and Klytemnestra.*

ORESTES.

Behold ye these two tyrants of the land,

My father's slayers who made his home a ruin.

Worship had they, once sitting on the throne :

They are lovers yet, as shows the fate they share,

And their oath-plight abides unbroken yet.

They plighted oath to slay mine hapless sire,

And be in death one—and the oath is kept.

Mark yet again, O hearers of these woes, 980

*(holds up the robe in which Agamemnon was entangled  
at his murder)*

This death-gin, snare that trapped my hapless sire,

Gyves for his hands, linked shackles for his feet !

Unfold it wide, and in a ring stand round

To show a king's shroud, that the Sire may see—

Not mine, but He that on all this looks down,

The Sun-god—see my mother's foul, foul deeds,

That he may stand my witness at the bar

That on my mother righteously I wreaked

This doom—I speak not of Ægisthus' doom :

He hath the adulterer's lawful punishment— 990  
 Who for her lord devised this hateful thing,  
 For him whose children 'neath her zone she bare,  
 Who loved her once, now hate, as all may see.  
 What think ye is she?—a sea-snake, or a viper,  
 Whose touch blasts even him who 'scapes her fangs,  
 If reckless daring, venomous spite, can slay.  
 How shall I call this thing, and name aright?  
 A wild-beast snare?—the curtain of a bath  
 Muffling a dead man's feet?—O nay, a net!  
 Toils and foot-tangling vestures call thou these. 1000  
 Such thing as this some robber might possess  
 To trap the stranger, one that practiseth  
 A life of rapine, killing by this snare  
 Many, and makes his soul a forge of hell.  
 Never in mine home may such woman live  
 With me! God grant me childless death ere then!

CHORUS.

Alas for the piteous deed! Alas!  
 By a ghastly death thou hast been laid low;  
 And for him that remaineth alive is anguish flowerlike  
 blooming.

ORESTES.

Wrought she that crime or no? My witness be 1010  
 This robe, incarnadined by Ægisthus' sword.  
 The dark blood-smear hath wrought with time's long  
 lapse  
 To mar the dye-hues of the broidered work.  
 His praises now I speak, now wail his death,  
 Crying to this, my father's murder-web.  
 Deeds, sufferings I lament, yea, all mine house—  
 I, with this victory's loathed pollution stained!

## CHORUS.

No man of the sons of earth shall pass  
Through his whole life's journey unscathed of  
woe.

Now is one disaster upon us: now near is a second  
looming. 1020

## ORESTES.

Nay, know ye—for the end I cannot see—  
As in a chariot-race I am swerving wide  
Out of the course. I am hurried helpless on  
By reinless thoughts. Upon my heart broods Fear  
Ready to sing and dance her fury-dance!  
But, ere my reason goes, I tell my friends—  
Tell them, I slew my mother righteously,  
The foul thing, loathed of Gods, that slew my sire.  
He whose spells drew me to this deed, I claim,  
Was Pytho's prophet Loxias, who foretold 1030  
That, doing it, I should be clear of blame;  
Refraining—I name not the penalty:—  
Some pangs outrange imagination's bow.  
Now look on me, how, with this suppliant bough  
And wreath arrayed, on earth's mid-navel stone  
I shall sit down, on Loxias' holy floor,  
By the altar-fire they name the Undying Flame,  
Fleeing this taint of kindred blood:—no hearth  
Save his alone, did Loxias bid me seek.  
I bid all Argives in the days to be 1040  
Witness that not in cruelty I slew.  
So I, a homeless wanderer from this land,  
Living and dying leave this fame for mine.

## CHORUS.

Nay, thou hast done well : yoke not thou thy lips  
To words ill-omened : bode not horrors thou.  
Freedom hast thou unto all Argos given,  
Whose swift stroke lopped the heads of serpents twain.

## ORESTES.

Ha !—Handmaid women, there in Gorgon guise  
They come with sable robes and hair enwreathed  
With tangled snakes ! I can no longer stay. 1050

## CHORUS.

What fancies, O most duteous of all sons,  
Rack thee ? Stand firm—fear not, in victory's hour.

## ORESTES.

No fancied shapes these my tormentors are !  
These are my mother's hell-hounds manifest.

## CHORUS.

Yet fresh-spilt is the blood upon thine hands ;  
Therefrom distraction falleth on thy soul.

## ORESTES.

O King Apollo ! lo, they swarm, they swarm !  
The loathly blood is dripping from their eyes !

## CHORUS.

Haste to where cleansing waits : to Loxias cling.  
He from these agonies shall set thee free. 1060

## ORESTES.

Ye, ye behold not these, but I behold !  
I am hunted hence—I can no longer stay !

[*Exit.*

## CHORUS.

Blessing go with thee ! God look graciously  
On thee, and guard unto some happier lot !

Lo, how upon the palace royal hath burst  
The third storm that fulfils the house's fate !  
First, wretch Thyestes at a feast accurst  
Of his own children ate :

Then shrieked the second storm the agony  
Of that king in that laver hacked to death, 1070  
When the Achaians' chief to treachery  
There yielded up his breath :

Now on the third storm's wild wings down doth sweep  
A Saviour—or a Doom shall he be named ?  
Where shall the Curse end ?—how be lulled to sleep  
Its fury ?—how be tamed ?

[*Exeunt.*

THE EUMENIDES  
OR  
THE RECONCILIATION.

*Finis*



## ARGUMENT.

*BECAUSE Orestes had slain his mother, the Avengers of Kindred Blood, the Spirits which are named Erinyes, and Eumenides, and Furies, haunted him evermore, chasing him from land to land. Though he had but done the bidding of the Oracle of Apollo, and had been purified, with all due rites, from the guilt of blood, they would not be appeased, but pursued after him day and night, with intent to wear and waste away his life, and thereafter to torment him in death for ever.*

*And herein is told how he came to his last refuge, and was set on his trial before the Powers of Heaven and of Hell, and before men, and of the great propitiation that was made.*



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

APOLLO.

ATHENA.

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon and slayer of his mother.*

GHOST OF KLYTEMNESTRA.

PRIESTESS *of the Oracle at Delphi.*

THE JUDGES, *twelve burghers of Athens.*

CHORUS, *consisting of the twelve Eumenides, or Furies.*

SCENE : 1st, the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

2nd, the Temple of Athena at Athens.

3rd, the Areopagus at Athens.

THE EUMENIDES  
OR  
THE RECONCILIATION.

*In front of the door of the temple. Enter the Priestess.*

PRIESTESS.

CHIEF place in this my prayer I give to Earth  
First Prophetess; and unto Themis next,  
Who second sat on this her mother's throne  
Of prophecy, as saith the legend. Third,  
By her consent—constraint was none therein—  
Phœbê, another Titan child of Earth,  
Was throned thereon, and she her birth-gift gave  
To Phœbus, who from Phœbê hath his name.  
So left he Delos' mere and rocky ridge,  
Landed on Pallas' ship-frequented shores, 10  
And came to this land, to Parnassus' shrine,  
Whither the Fire-god's sons with reverent feet  
Escorted him, the men that through the waste  
His highway made, and tamed the savage earth.  
So came he with high worship of our folk  
And Delphos, king and helmsman of this land.  
And Zeus with inspiration filled his soul,  
And seated him fourth Prophet on the throne,  
Loxias, interpreter of Father Zeus.

To these Gods I put up my prelude-prayer. 20  
 And Temple-warder Pallas hath mine homage.  
 The Nymphs I reverence, by Korykia's rock  
 Bird-loved that dwell, the caverned haunt of Gods.  
 And Bromius dwells here—I forget not him—  
 Since the God led his Bacchanals to war,  
 And to his doom snared Pentheus, like a hare.  
 On Pleistus' fountains, on Poseidon's might  
 I call, on Zeus most high, the Accomplisher.  
 So sit I down on my prophetic chair.  
 Vouchsafe ye me a better entrance now 30  
 Than all before ! What Greeks soe'er be here,  
 Let them by lot draw nigh, as custom bids :  
 For as the God guides, so I prophesy.

*Enters the temple. Comes tottering forth, clinging for support to walls and pillars.*

O dread to tell, O dread for eyes to see,  
 That which hath driven me back from Loxias' halls,  
 So strengthless that I cannot lift my steps,  
 Trailed by mine hands forth, sped not by my feet !  
 Age terror-thrilled is naught, is as a babe.  
 Into the crypt with garlands hung I passed—  
 There on the Navel-stone one god-accurst 40  
 I saw, in suppliant posture seated : blood  
 Dripped from his hands : a sword that seemed new-  
 drawn

He grasped, and held an olive's topmost spray  
 All duly twined with wool-strands passing long  
 From snowy fleece :—my tale thus far is clear.  
 But lo, in front of this man a strange troop  
 Of women sleepeth on the chairs of stone—  
 Not women—Gorgons rather name I them ;

Yet not to Gorgon-shapes I liken these.  
 Once saw I pictured Harpies bearing off 50  
 The meat of Phineus—yet were these unwinged,  
 Swart-hued and hideous-wrought in every part.  
 Their breath out-snoring blasts whoe'er draw nigh;  
 And from their eyes drips down a loathly rheum.  
 Their vesture it were sacrilege to bring  
 Before Gods' statues, or to homes of men.  
 No tribe whence such a crew could spring I have seen,  
 Nor land that boasts, 'I have reared, uncurs'd thereby,  
 This brood, nor wailed disaster born of them.'  
 Let mighty Loxias, master of this fane, 60  
 Himself see to the issue of these things:  
 For he is Healer-prophet, Portent-seer,  
 Pollution-banisher even from others' homes.

*Scene opens, disclosing inner temple. Orestes clasping omphalos. Furies sleeping.*

*Enter Apollo and Hermes.*

APOLLO.

I never will forsake thee. To the end  
 I ward thee, standing nigh or far-withdrawn,  
 And to thy foes ungentle will I be.  
 Even now thou seest these ravin-demons trapped:  
 They are fallen on sleep, yon maidens all-aborred,  
 Night's ancient children, with whom none of Gods  
 Hath commerce, no, nor ever man nor brute. 70  
 They are made for evil only, for they dwell  
 In evil gloom and nether Tartarus,  
 The hate of men and Gods Olympian.  
 Howbeit flee thou: let thy strength not fail;  
 For they will chase thee o'er far-stretching lands,

Ever as tramp the earth thy wandering feet,  
 And pass the sea and surf-ringed island-towns.  
 Yet faint not, thus, like some hard-driven steer,  
 On-goaded; but to Pallas' city go:  
 Clasp her ancient image seat thee there. 80  
 There will we find us judges of thy cause,  
 And words of suasion: so will we devise  
 Thy full deliverance from these sufferings,  
 For I, I thrust thee on to slay thy mother.

ORESTES.

O King Apollo, thou canst do no wrong; .  
 And, being such, do thou forget me not.  
 Thy power is all-sufficient for mine aid.

APOLLO.

Remember: let not fear thine heart o'ercome.  
 And thou, my brother by the selfsame Sire,  
 Hermes, protect him. To thy surname true! 90  
 Be guide to him: lead as a shepherd on  
 My suppliant. Zeus respects that sanctity  
 Of outlaws, which thine escort lends to men.

[*Exeunt Apollo, Hermes, and Orestes.*]

*Ghost of Klytemnestra rises, and bends over the sleeping Furies.*

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Ay, slumber on! What do ye thus to sleep?  
 And I the while, thus set at nought of you,  
 Amidst the dead am made a laughing-stock,  
 A scorn of scorns, because of him I slew!

1. Hermes the Guide-god, as he is repeatedly called in Homer.

In shame I wander : yea, I tell you this,  
That of the dead I am bitterly reviled.  
Though nearest kin dealt me this hideous wrong, 100  
None of the Gods is angered for my sake—  
For me, butchered by matricidal hands !  
Look on these stabs, in thine heart's vision look,  
For in sleep lightened are the spirit's eyes :  
By day the soul's prophetic gift doth fail.  
Ha, oft have ye lapped up mine offerings,  
Bowls—not of wine, but sober soothing gifts ;  
Night-solemn feasts upon your hearth I burned  
At such an hour as no God claims beside.  
And all these see I trampled underfoot ! 110  
He hath 'scaped you ; like a fawn, clean gone is he,  
Ay, lightly from the midst of these your toils  
Hath sped, with curling lips of utter scorn.  
Hearken to mine appeal for my soul's sake !  
Give heed, O Goddesses of Nethergloom !  
Klytemnestra calls you—now a bodiless dream !

*Chorus mutter in sleep.*

Ay, mutter on ! Your prey afar is fled !  
Ha, friends hath he—not broken reeds like mine !

*Chorus mutter in sleep.*

120

O'er-sound thy sleep is—me thou pitiest not.  
Gone is Orestes, slayer of his mother !

*Chorus moan in sleep.*

Thou moanest, slumberest—wilt not straightway rise ?  
What hast thou ever done save fashion evil ?

*Chorus moan in sleep.*

Slumber and ache of toil, conspirators  
 Potent, have quelled the fearful dragon's strength.

*Chorus break repeatedly into frenzied muttering.*

CHORUS.

Seize, seize him, seize him, seize him! Ha, take  
 heed! 130

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Chasing in dreams the prey—still giving tongue,  
 Like hound that ceaseth not to hunt in sleep!  
 What dost thou?—rise! Let toil not quell thy  
 strength,  
 Let sleep not lull thee to forget my grief:  
 Let thy soul writhe beneath my just reproach,  
 For to the wise upbraidings are as goads.  
 Waft thou thy breath in spray of blood on him;  
 Blast him with fire-reek blazing from thy womb.  
 Chase—wither with pursuit renewed his strength.

*Ghost descends.*

*The Furies one by one start up from sleep.*

CHORUS.

Arouse—arouse thou her, as I rouse thee! 140  
 Ha! slumbering still?—arise!—spurn sleep from thee!  
 Let us see if this prelude peals in vain.

(*Str. 1*)

Woe for us! Out on it! Friends, with what anguish  
 of toil have we wrought—  
 Manifold anguish endured, and have wasted our  
 strength for nought—

Anguish and wrong unendurable!—Out on it! well-a-day!

Out of the toils hath he slipped; O, the quarry hath stolen away!

Sleep-overcome was my vigilant watch—I have lost the prey!

(*Ant. 1*)

Scion of Zeus, art a filcher, a thief!—ho, I taunt thee with crime!

Youngling thou hast overridden divinities hoary as time!—

150

Ay, hast regarded thy suppliant, the godless, unnatural son,

Stolen the matricide out of our clutch—this thy god-head hath done!

Who shall stand up for thee—say that by justice this vantage was won?

(*Str. 2*)

Me the reproaches that burst through the midst of the dreams of the night

Stung like a chariot-goad by the midst of the shaft grasped tight;

Ay, through mine heart and my liver I felt the ghost-hand smite.

Writhing am I as one writhes 'neath the merciless scourger's hand,

Lashed in the market-place by command of the lords of the land,

160

Shivers and swoons, while the cold sweat-beads on his white face stand.

(*Ant. 2*)

Such are the deeds that they do, these upstart gods of an hour!



Such is their utter defiance of justice in using their  
power!  
Lo, what a blood-clot, that drips with a very murder-  
shower,  
Crimsons him, head to foot!—ye may see how the  
Navel-stone,  
Pivot and centre of earth, is defiled, for thereover is  
thrown  
Hideous pollution of bloodshed: the holy unholy is  
grown!

(*Str.* 3)

Prophet, thou surely hast taken the curse, whose  
pollution doth rest  
Dark on that house; on thy shrine hast thou thrust  
it, thine own bidden guest. 170  
Contrariwise to the wont of the Gods thou regardest  
man,  
Crushest the Fates which were born of old when time  
began.

(*Ant.* 3)

Yea, unto me is he tyrannous: yet shall he set him  
not free!  
Ha, though he flee 'neath the earth, delivered he  
shall not be!  
He, the polluted, shall find there another avenger of  
guilt  
Waiting to wreak on his head the curse of the blood  
he hath spilt.

*Enter Apollo.*

APOLLO.

Out! I command you, from these halls with speed  
Depart—begone from my prophetic shrines, 180

Lest, feeling the winged flashing Serpent's sting  
As from the golden-plaited string it leaps,  
Thou void for anguish black foam sucked from men,  
Vomiting gouts of slaughter gorged by thee.  
It fits not that ye touch these halls of mine.  
Go where revenges cleave heads, gouge out eyes,  
Where slaughters reek, where perisheth manhood's  
seed  
From outraged boyhood's bloom, feet, hands, are  
lopped,  
Where stones rain death, where long moans piteously  
Burst from the wretch impaled :—ha, hear ye now 190  
What festival, O demons god-abhorred,  
Is your delight ? Therewith your form's whole fashion  
Accordeth ! A blood-lapping lion's cave  
Might such inhabit fitlier, not pollute  
By your foul presence this my sanctuary.  
Hence, beasts by keeper never shepherded !  
Herd whereof none is pleasing to the Gods !

## CHORUS.

O King Apollo, hearken thou in turn.  
In this deed none with thee doth share the blame :  
Thyself didst all ; the guilt is wholly thine. 200

## APOLLO.

How, prithee ? Thus far lengthen out thy speech.

## CHORUS.

Thine oracle made thy guest a matricide.

## APOLLO.

Mine oracle bade avenge his sire—what then ?

• CHORUS.

Thou promisedst shelter to him—red from murder !

APOLLO.

Yea, bade him flee for refuge to these halls.

CHORUS.

And us, who dogged him hither, dost revile ?

APOLLO.

Yea, for mine house is not for you to approach.

CHORUS.

But our appointed work, our right, is this.

APOLLO.

Your rights ?—ay, vaunt your high prerogative !

CHORUS.

We chase the mother-slayers from their homes. 210

APOLLO.


What of the wife that murdereth her lord ?

CHORUS.

That is no blood of kin by kindred shed.

APOLLO.

Lo, thou dishonourest, hold'st as nothing-worth,  
The troth that Hera hallowed, wedding Zeus.  
An outcast by thy plea is Kypris made,  
Of whom the ties most dear to mortals spring.  
For marriage fate-ordained for man and wife,  
Warded by Justice, mightier is than oaths.  
And if thou slack thine hand from punishing



When these their yokemates slay, nor look in wrath,  
Wrongfully, say I, dost thou hunt Orestes. [220  
Against this sin I mark thee fiercely rage,  
By that unruffled, all the world may see.  
But Goddess Pallas shall see justice done.

CHORUS.

Ne'er will I cease from haunting yonder man !

APOLLO.

O yea, pursue !—so get to thee more toil.

CHORUS.

Curtail not thou mine honours by thy speech !

APOLLO.

Thine honours !—as a gift not mine be they !

CHORUS.

O yea, great art thou named by Zeus's throne !  
But I—for a mother's blood aye draws me on— 230  
Claim him for punishment, still hunt him down.

APOLLO.

But I will shield and save my suppliant.  
For men and Gods account a fearful thing  
The wrath of suppliants wilfully betrayed.

*Scene changes to Temple of Athena at Athens. Orestes  
discovered clinging to her statue.*

ORESTES.

Athena, Queen, by Loxias' commands  
I come. Be gracious to a hunted wretch,  
Whose stain is not unpurged from hands uncleansed,

But dulled by now, yea, vesture-like worn thin  
 By touch of homes and paths of other men.  
 Far-journeying alike o'er land and sea, 240  
 Heeding the hests of Loxias' oracles,  
 Goddess, thine house, thine image, have I reached ;  
 And here, till Justice speak my doom, I wait.

*Enter Chorus.*

CHORUS.

Ha ! lo you there, the man's slot plain to see !  
 Follow the tokens of the voiceless guide !  
 For, as the hound pursues the wounded fawn,  
 By blood-spot and by foam-fleck track we him.  
 With manifold strength-outwearing toil hard pants  
 Mine heart ; for all earth have we quested o'er,  
 And o'er the sea with wingless hoverings 250  
 I came pursuing, by no ship outsped.  
 And now he cowereth somewhere hidden nigh.  
 Ha ! blithely it greets me—scent of human blood !  
 Watch, O watch with sleepless care,  
 Peering here and glancing there,  
 Lest the unpunished matricide  
 Flee by speed, by cunning hide.  
 Lo there once more !—protection hath he found !  
 Clasping the immortal Goddess' image round  
 He claims the right of trial of his guilt. 260  
 This may not be : a mother's life-blood spilt  
 On earth, may not be gathered up again :  
 'Tis past recall, once poured upon the plain.  
 Nay, I shall suck—thou canst not choose but pay the  
 penalty—  
 The red gore from thy living limbs, and win me out  
 of thee

The banquet of a draught that shall with awful  
anguish flow. †

Yea, I will waste thy living frame, then drag thee far  
below,

There to pay all thy penalty, the mother-murderer's  
woe.

So shall all else that have transgressed,  
Have sinned against a God, a guest, 270  
Or parents, mark how each receives  
The dues of sin that Justice gives.

For Hades 'neath the earth waits every soul,  
A mighty judge who watcheth to enscroll  
All sins on his eternal memory's roll.

ORESTES.

I, lessoned in misfortune's school, have learnt  
Full many a cleansing rite, have learnt when Law  
Requireth speech, or silence ; and herein  
By a wise teacher's bidding do I speak.  
Lo, the blood sleeps and fades upon mine hand, 280  
And matricide's pollution is washed clean.  
For, when it yet was fresh, at Phœbus' hearth  
'Twas banished by ablutions of slain swine.  
Long were the tale, from its beginning told,  
Of all I have visited, nor brought them harm.  
Time cleanseth all things, aging as they age.  
And now with pure lips piously I call  
Upon Athena, this land's Queen, to come  
Mine helper : so without war shall she win  
Myself, my land, and Argos' folk, for hers, 290  
Her loyal ally ever, by just right.  
Be she in regions of far Libya-land  
By Triton's flow, the stream that gave her birth,

Erect, or throned with vesture-veilèd foot,  
 Armed for friends' aid, or over Phlegra's plain  
 Like some bold captain darts she an eagle-glance—  
 Let her, as Goddess, hear from far, and come,  
 Come, to be my deliverer from these ills.

## CHORUS.

Thee nor Apollo, nor Athena's might  
 Shall save from perishing, an outcast thing,           300  
 A soul that hath forgot the taste of joy,  
 A prey by fiends sucked bloodless, a thin wraith! . . .  
 Dost thou reply not? Dost thou spurn my words?—  
 Thou, for me nourished, unto me devoted?  
 Slain on no altar, thou shalt feast me alive,  
 Shalt hear the hymn that charms thee by this spell:—

Sisters, weave we now the dance:  
 Now 'tis time to chant our song,  
 Chant the ghastly doom of wrong:  
 Publish now the ordinance                               310  
 This our band for men doth frame:—  
 We unbending justice claim.  
 They whose hands no guilt imbrues,  
 No such men our wrath pursues;  
 Scatheless on through life they win.  
 When they, like this man of sin,  
 Cover hands that murders stain,  
 Righteous champions of the slain,  
 Blood-avengers, we attend,  
 Haunting them unto the end.                               320

(Str. 1)

Mother, who didst bear me, Mother Night, a vengeance  
 ever near

Unto men bereft of life-light, men yet seeing light, O  
hear!

Me the son of Leto doth dishonour, from mine hands  
would fain

Wrest this cowerer, mine atonement-victim for a  
mother slain!

Ha, but o'er our slaughtered<sup>1</sup> victim hear our chant  
triumphant ring!—

Madness, frenzy soul-destroying, is the hymn the  
Erinyes sing, 330

Soul-enchaining, lyreless, blasting mortal frames and  
withering!

(*Ant.* 1)

This our lot and portion is, the thread by Doom the  
unswerving spun

For our sure prerogative—that mortals by whose  
hands are done

Impious murders, aye we haunt them till they sink  
into the grave.

Yea, and 'neath the earth our bondmen are they: none  
shall help nor save. 340

Ay, and o'er our slaughtered victim hear our chant  
triumphant ring!—

Madness, frenzy soul-destroying, is the hymn the  
Erinyes sing,

Soul-enchaining, lyreless, blasting mortal frames and  
withering.

(*Str.* 2)

In the hour that beheld our being begun  
Were these our prerogatives ratified:

1. Proleptic, as in 'So these two brothers and *their murdered man* rode to fair Florence.' (Keats, *Pot of Basil*.)



No dealings have we with Immortals ; none      350  
 Will deign at the banquet to sit by our side :  
 No part nor lot for ever have I  
 In white robes' glistening radiancy ;  
 But we take for our portion the desolation  
 Of homes which are made Strife's habitation :  
 When the hand is with life-blood of kin made red,  
 Then hunt we the slayer ; our strength shall out-  
 last him,  
 Be he never' so swift ; we o'ertake him, we blast  
 him

By the power of the blood ever-fresh he hath shed.  
(*Ant.* 2)

And we give all diligence hereunto      360  
 That our burden shall be from the Gods afar  
 Removed, that the vengeance-quest be our due,  
 That the kin-slayer stand not before their bar.  
 The blood-streaming abhorred ones doth Zeus  
 disallow ;

He hears not their prayer, he rejecteth their vow.  
 Then we, from our ambush of cloud down-flashing,  
 With a leap as of lions bring down the crashing  
 Might of our feet on the wretch as he flies,  
 With the clutch of our talons to earthward flinging  
 The limbs that the strength of terror is winging—  
 Lo, crushed under ruin resistless he lies !      [370

(*Str.* 3)

Imaginations proudly swelling of men beneath the free  
 sky dwelling

Deep under earth shall shrivel shame-abased,  
 Soon as our onrush shall have found them, soon as  
 our black robes sweep around them  
 In measures that our vengeful feet have paced.

(*Ant.* 3)

The wretch sin-wildered falls, unknowing whence  
comes his sudden overthrowing,

Above him drifts such pestilence of gloom,  
While voices multitudinous-groaning their wrongs  
against his house are moaning, [380  
Whose breath is blackness of the mist of doom.

(*Str.* 4)

Law abideth everlasting : cunning are we, and unfail-  
ing

Workers of its sentence, awful sin-recorders : un-  
availing

With us is prayer.

Onward ever press we hasting to perform an office  
lacking

Honour, worship—yea, unlawful for the Gods  
Olympian—tracking

Paths of despair

Down through sunless darkness sloping : stumbling  
blindly, blindly groping

Sinners unbereft of sight, sinners death-bereft of light  
Wander there.

(*Ant.* 4)

Who of mortals doth not shiver all his pulses through,  
and feareth

For the terror of my coming, when the awful law he  
heareth, 390

Mine ordinance ?—mine

By decrees of Fate for ever sealed and ratified, and  
given

Into these, the Hands of Dooming working out the  
will of Heaven,

The law divine ?—

Such my right from times eternal : none may scorn  
 me, though infernal  
 Darkness brood above the place assigned to me, where  
 never rays  
 Of sun may shine.

*Athena descends.*

ATHENA.

From far, beside Skamander, thine appeal  
 I heard, where I took seisin of the land,  
 Even that which the Achaian chiefs and kings  
 Assigned for ever, root and fruit, to me, 400  
 My goodly portion of the spoils of war,  
 A gift for Theseus' scions set apart.  
 Thence came I, onward speeding tireless feet :  
 The winds, my viewless car-steeds, flew so fast  
 That in their wingless flight mine ægis hissed.  
 Seeing this concourse, wholly strange to earth,  
 I fear not, yet amazement fills mine eyes.  
 Who, who be ye ?—to all your rout I speak,  
 And to this stranger by mine image crouched.  
 Speak, ye who are like to none of all earth's seed, 410  
 Who are not of Goddesses whom Gods behold,  
 Who bear no semblance unto human shape—  
 Yet it beseems not that bystanders mock  
 A shape deform : justice draws back therefrom.

CHORUS.

Daughter of Zeus, thou shalt in brief learn all.  
 Children are we of everlasting Night.  
 The Curses are we named in the Underworld.

ATHENA.

Thy lineage now I know, thy name and fame.

CHORUS.

Yea, straight shalt thou learn my prerogatives.

ATHENA.

Fain would I, if they may be plainly told. 420

CHORUS.

Slayers of men we chase forth from their homes.

ATHENA.

What bourne hath the manslayer's banishment ?

CHORUS.

Where happiness hath nowhere any place.

ATHENA.

Such exile dost thou hiss against yon man ?

CHORUS.

Yea, for he took on him to slay his mother.

ATHENA.

Fear-spurred by no strong Power, no wrath of  
Heaven ?

CHORUS.

What goad so keen as spur to matricide ?

ATHENA.

Before the court are two pleas—one is heard.

CHORUS.

Nay, he would neither take nor tender oath.<sup>1</sup>

1. *i.e.* He will not comply with the formalities of procedure, and therefore I demand that he be at once non-suited.

ATHENA.

More than her deeds thou lovest Justice' name. 430

CHORUS.

How?—teach me: wisdom hast thou and to spare.

ATHENA.

I say, no oaths can make the wrong prevail.

CHORUS.

Made inquisition then; judge righteous judgment.

ATHENA.

Commit ye this decision unto me?

CHORUS.


Yea surely, worthy child of worthy sire.

ATHENA.

Stranger, in thy turn what wilt say hereto?  
Thy land, thy lineage, thine afflictions tell  
First; then repel thou thine accusers' charge,  
If thou in justice trusting hast sat down  
Clasping mine image, hard beside mine hearth, 440  
A sacred suppliant, as Ixion sat.  
Answer all this, and be thine answer clear.

ORESTES.

Athena, Queen, the dark misgiving first  
That lurks in thy last words, I do away.  
I am not guilt-stained: no pollution comes  
From mine hand, by thine image as I crouch.  
And I will give thee perfect proof of this:—  
Sealed are the tainted murderer's lips by law,  
Till by the blood-atoning minister



A suckling beast's blood have besprent his hands. 450  
Long since in other fanes thus purified  
Was I, by victims and by running streams.  
So I pronounce this fear clean put away.  
Now of my lineage straightway shalt thou hear.  
An Argive am I : well thou know'st my sire,  
Agamemnon, marshaller of sea-borne men,  
With whom thou madest Ilium's city Troy  
No city. He at his home-coming died  
Shamefully. Yea, my mother, the black-souled,  
Slew him : she shrouded him in subtle toils 460  
Which witness still that murder of the bath.  
When I, an exile theretofore, came home,  
I slew my mother, I deny it not,  
In vengeance for mine own dear father's blood.  
What guilt is in this deed doth Loxias share,  
Who threatened pangs, to sting mine heart as goads,  
If on the guilty I wreaked no revenge.  
Thou judge my deed ; pronounce it right or wrong ;  
Howe'er thou deal with me, I murmur not.

## ATHENA.

The matter is so great, no mortal man 470  
Dare judge it. I, even I, am disallowed  
From giving doom on vengeance-waking murder ;  
The more, since thou hast been assoiled, and yet,  
Though shriven and clean, cam'st suppliant to my  
fane.  
Howbeit, as purged, I bid thee enter Athens.  
Yet these—their dues not lightly are set aside ;  
And, if their cause be not victorious,  
The venom of their malice shall thereafter  
Fall on the land in plagues intolerable.

Thus stands it—whether they depart or stay      480  
 Alike is grievous : I am in a strait.  
 But, seeing this bolt from out the blue falls here,  
 Sworn judges will I choose of murder, so  
 An ordinance for ever will ordain.  
 Ye, summon your sworn witnesses, and show  
 Proofs, by the which shall justice be maintained.  
 The best of all my burghers will I choose,  
 And come, that these may truly try this cause,  
 Oath-bound to utter no unrighteous verdict.

[*Exeunt Athena and Orestes.*]

CHORUS.      (*Str. 1*)

Now shall be overthrown the old-time laws,      490  
       New statutes shall bear sway,  
 If yonder mother-murderer's cause, the cause  
       Of wrong, prevail this day.  
 Lo, this day's work shall arm full many an one  
       With reckless lust of crime ;  
 For many a parent murdered by a son  
 Doth veriest agony wait—nor now alone,  
       But through all tides of time.

(*Ant. 1*)

The Frenzied Furies, who mankind behold,  
       No more shall curse this sin,      500  
 But slip the leash of murders manifold  
       Of kin by hands of kin.  
 Man shall ask man, the while he tells the tale  
       Of wrongs to near kin wrought,  
 'How shall these plagues end—cease awhile to assail ?'  
 Ah wretch ! his comfort shall no whit avail,  
       His cure shall profit nought.

(Str. 2)

Ha! then let none appeal when his days darken,  
     When murder's dagger smites, 510  
 Crying to heaven his prayer—'Hear, Justice!—  
     hearken,  
     Thrones of the Avenging Sprites!'  
 Thus may a father from death's anguish calling  
     Shriek, or a mother slain—  
 Too late! This day is Justice' temple falling:  
     Tears build it not again.

(Ant. 2)

'Tis good that Fear yet lingering midst the nations  
     Somewhere should watch man's soul  
 Throned in the conscience, good that tribulations  
     Should teach men self-control. 520  
 Who, if he nurture not a spirit humble,  
     When all his path is bright,  
 Who—be it state or man—can choose but stumble  
     From reverence for Right?

(Str. 3)

Envy not thou the freedom that defieth  
 Control, nor that slave-life which cowering lieth  
     A tyrant lord's footstool:  
 'God to life's middle walk the palm hath given  
 Aye'—though elsewhere the governance of Heaven  
     Seem ordered by no rule— 530  
 Ay, and my strain this chord with that inweaveth:  
 'Verily godlessness, when it conceiveth,  
     Brings arrogance to birth;'  
 But child of wholesome soberness of spirit  
 Fair fortune is, which all men pray to inherit,  
     Dear to all sons of earth.



*(Ant. 3)*

This of my teaching is the sum—O hear it!—

Justice's altar, see that thou revere it :

Dare not spurn this aside [540

With godless heel, what time thy passions blind thee

To all save gain : vengeance is close behind thee ;

Fixed doth the end abide.

Then, whosoe'er thou art, with reverence lowly

Honour thy father and thy mother : holy

Be in thy sight the claim

Of him who cometh to thy portals faring

Thy guest ; with hospitality unsparing

Do thou receive the same.

*(Str. 4)*

He who of his free will

550

Doth righteousness, shall still

Be blest : no surge of ill

Shall whelm him under :

But he who overleaps

Justice, whose dragnet sweeps

In heaps confused on heaps

Unhallowed plunder,

He shall perforce at last

Lower his sail, when mast

And yard by trouble's blast

Are riven asunder.

*(Ant. 4)*

He, shrieking forth his prayer

To heavens that hear not, there

Mid whirlpits of despair

Hellward descendeth.

God laughs at him, to see

560

His helpless agony—

Fool, who made boast, 'O'er me  
 No doom impendeth !'  
 Hurl'd toward yon ness his keel  
 O'er Justice' reef doth reel—  
 Lost, lost, unwept, his weal  
 For ever endeth !

*The scene changes to the Areopagus at Athens. Enter  
 Athena, with twelve Athenian burghers. Then  
 enter Orestes, followed by the Chorus.*

ATHENA.

Herald, lift up thy voice ; hush thou the throng ;  
 And let the shattering Tuscan trumpet's throat,  
 Filled with the straining breath of mortal lips,  
 Peal forth its cry far-soaring o'er the host.  
 While filling are these judgment-seats, it fits      570  
 That men be hushed, that all the city hear  
 Mine ordinance eternal, that this man  
 May hear withal, and justice' doom be given.

*[Trumpet. Enter Apollo.]*

CHORUS.

Apollo, King, thou lord it o'er thine own !  
 Say thou, what hast thou with this cause to do ?

APOLLO.

I come to bear my witness : this man is  
 Guest of my temple, suppliant of my shrine.  
 And I am he that cleansed this murder-stain,  
 And I am he shall justify him. Mine  
 The guilt is of this mother's murder. Thou      580  
 Open this cause, and, as thou find'st, decide.

ATHENA (*to Chorus.*)

First word to you : I open so this cause ;  
For right it is that first the accuser speak,  
From the beginning setting forth the matter.

CHORUS.

Many we are, yet shall our words be few.  
Thou, answering, by each question set reply.  
Thy mother—tell us first, didst thou slay her ?

ORESTES.

I slew : not on denial rests my plea.

CHORUS.

Lo, of the three falls one already ours !

ORESTES.

Thou vauntest over one not thrown as yet. 590

CHORUS.

Nay, thou must tell how thou didst murder her.

ORESTES.

I tell : mine hand drew sword and gashed her throat.

CHORUS.

So ?—moved of whom, and by whose counselling ?

ORESTES.

By this God's oracles. He my witness is.

CHORUS.

He, the God-prophet, bade thee slay thy mother !

ORESTES.

He : nor thus far I murmur at my fate.

CHORUS.

Doomed by the votes, thou soon shalt change thy tone !

ORESTES.

I trust yet. My sire helps me from his tomb.

CHORUS.

O yea, trust in the dead, thou mother-slayer !

ORESTES.

Yea, for a twofold crime polluted her. 600

CHORUS.

Yea ?—how ? Instruct these judges touching this.

ORESTES.

She slew her husband, and she slew my sire.

CHORUS.

Death, then, her debt hath cancelled, not thine—yet.

ORESTES.

Why did ye hunt not *her*, while yet she lived ?

CHORUS.

She was not blood-kin to the man she slew.

ORESTES.

And I, am I by blood my mother's kin ?

CHORUS.

Bare she not thee, red murderer, 'neath her zone ?  
Dar'st thou disown thy mother's most dear blood ?

ORESTES.

Now bear thou witness. Set thou forth for me,

Apollo, if I slew her rightfully. 610  
For I disown the deed not, as it stands.  
If rightly shed or wrongly seems this blood  
To thy mind, judge, that I may tell it these.

## APOLLO.

To you, Athena's great court, will I speak  
Righteously. I, the Prophet, will not lie.  
Never I spake on my prophetic throne  
Concerning man, nor woman, neither state,  
Aught save what Zeus the Olympians' Father bade.  
Heed ye the might of this, the Fount of Justice,  
And bow before the purpose of my Sire; 620  
No oath prevails to override Zeus' word.

## CHORUS.

Zeus, as thou sayest, gave this oracle  
That bade Orestes for his sire's blood take  
Vengeance, and count as nought his mother's right!

## APOLLO.

Is *her* death like a highborn hero's death,  
One honoured with the sceptre Zeus bestowed?—  
And he by a woman slain—not with fierce shafts  
That smite from far, as of some Amazon;  
But as thou, Pallas, shalt be told, and ye  
That sit to give your judgment-vote hereon. 630  
Home from the war, from earning meed of glory  
Beyond all other, she with loyal words  
Welcomed him: as he bathed, she cast o'er him  
Tent-like a robe that overdraped all; smote  
Her lord so trammelled in the gapless shroud.  
This doom, as hath been told, that hero found,  
The worship-worthy lord of sea-borne hosts.

So paint I her, that indignation-stung  
May be all folk ordained to judge this cause.

## CHORUS.

Zeus, by thy tale, most heeds the father's fate : 640  
Yet himself fettered Kronos, his grey sire !  
How dar'st thou say this clashes not with that ?  
Judges, I call you to record—give ear !

## APOLLO.

O monsters all-aborred, things loathed of Gods !  
Fetters might one loose : this wrong may be healed ;  
Yea, many a device to 'scape there is.  
But when the dust hath drunk the blood of man,  
Once dead, no resurrection is there then.  
For this my sire hath wrought no healing-spell,  
Though all things else he can reverse and change 650  
At will, in no wise panting in his strength.

## CHORUS.

Nay, mark whereunto tends thy plea for him :  
Who poured his mother's blood—his own—to earth,  
Shall *he* in Argos in his sire's halls dwell  
Thereafter?—at what public altars pray ?  
What clansmen's lustral laver shall receive him ?

## APOLLO.

This answer I—my pleading's justice mark !  
The mother of the child named hers is not  
The parent, but the new-sown issue's nurse.  
The sire is parent ; she but harboureth, 660  
A stranger-guest, such life as God blasts not.  
Lo, of mine argument I give you proof :—  
There may be father without mother. There,

Child of Olympian Zeus, the witness stands ;  
 Not fostered she in darkness of the womb,  
 Yet scion such as Goddess never bare.  
 Pallas, in all else to mine utmost power  
 Will I make great thy city and thy folk ;  
 And this man to thy temple-hearth I sent  
 That he might be your leal friend evermore,        670  
 That thou mightst win him, Goddess, your ally,  
 Him and his children, and that by the seed  
 Of these this covenant may be cherished aye.

ATHENA (*to Chorus*).

Shall I bid these men from their conscience now  
 Judge righteous judgment ?—Hath enough been said ?

CHORUS.

Yea, for our every shaft by this is shot.  
 I wait to hear how shall the cause be judged.

ATHENA (*to Apollo and Orestes.*)

How then ? are ye content that so I rule ?

APOLLO.

Ye have heard whom ye have heard : now in your  
 hearts  
 Respect your oath the while ye give the vote.        680

ATHENA.

Now hearken to the statute, Attic folk  
 Who judge this first of trials for shed blood.  
 Yea, and henceforth for Aigeus' people stands  
 This council-place of judges evermore ;  
 Here on the War-God's Hill, the Amazons' camp  
 Where stood their tents, when came their host for hate

Of Theseus, and against yon town uppled,  
New-reared with stately towers, their rival burg,  
And sacrificed to Ares, whence the rock  
Is named the War-God's Hill :—here Reverence 690  
With Fear her sister, homed in burghers' hearts  
By day and night, shall all wrong-doing curb,  
While my folk take them not new laws for old :  
But if with tainted inflow and with mire  
Thou foul clear water, thou canst drink not thence.  
I warn my burghers—neither anarchy  
Nor tyranny embrace ye nor revere,  
Nor yet cast ye all fear beyond your walls :  
For what man can be just who feareth nought ?  
In righteous awe of this court's majesty 700  
Such bulwark of your land and of your town,  
Such safeguard, shall ye find, as no folk hath  
From norland Scythia south to Pelops' realm.  
This judgment-court do I thus found, by bribes  
Untainted, awful, unto vengeance swift,  
A warder watching o'er a sleeping land.  
This exhortation have I lengthened out  
Unto my burghers for all time. Now rise,  
Take each his pebble, and determine right  
In reverence for your oath. My say is said. 710

## CHORUS.

Lo now, I warn you in no wise to slight  
Us, heavy-handed visitants of your land.

## APOLLO.

And I command you, fear mine oracles,  
That are of Zeus too : fruitless make them not.



CHORUS.

Thou dost usurp this cognisance of blood !  
No more shall be thine oracles undefiled.

APOLLO.

How ?—erred Allfather in his counsels, when  
Ixion the first murderer suppliant came ?

CHORUS.

Ay, talk ! If justice be denied to me,  
I for its ruin haunt henceforth this land. 720

APOLLO.

Tush ! amid new and olden Gods alike  
Thou art unhonoured. Victory shall be mine.

CHORUS.

In Pheres' halls so didst thou—didst persuade  
The Fates to grant men immortality.

APOLLO.

Was it not right to bless who revered me,  
In that hour most when sorest was his need ?

CHORUS.

The old order thou destroyedst, and with wine  
Didst thou beguile the Ancient Goddesses.

APOLLO.

Soon shalt thou, by the judgment's issue foiled,  
Spue forth thy venom, yet harm not thy foes. 730

CHORUS.

Since thou, the young, o'erridest me the old,  
Only to hear the sentence given I wait,  
Yet doubtful whether to be wroth with Athens.

ATHENA.

With me it rests to give my sentence last.  
I to Orestes' cause shall add this vote :  
For mother is there none that gave me birth :  
I am wholly—save for marriage—with the male  
With all my soul ; I take the father's side.  
Of so much less account I hold the death  
Of her who slew her lord, the household's head. 740  
If equal be the votes, Orestes wins.  
Cast forth the lots with all speed from the urns  
Ye judges unto whom this office falls.

ORESTES.

Phœbus Apollo, how shall this strife end ?

CHORUS.

O Night, dark mother, seest thou these things ?

ORESTES.

Now strangling waits for me, or light of life !

CHORUS.

Ruin for us, or dignities increased !

APOLLO.

Mine hosts, the votes cast forth count ye aright :  
Justice in your decision reverence ye.  
If one vote lack, comes great calamity, 750  
And one vote rightly cast redeems a house.

ATHENA.

Acquitted is this man for blood arraigned ;  
For equal is the tale of either votes.

## ORESTES.

O Pallas, O thou saviour of mine house,  
 I was bereft of fatherland, and thou  
 Restoredst me! Now many a Greek shall say :  
 ' Argive once more, the man mid wealth ancestral  
 May dwell, by grace of Pallas, Loxias,  
 And of that third, the Saviour-lord, who rules  
 All things,' who for my sire's fate had respect, 760  
 Who, seeing these, the Avengers, saves me now.  
 And I unto this land and to thy folk  
 Make oath, as homeward now I turn to go,  
 That henceforth, through the fulness of all time,  
 Hitherward never chieftain of my land  
 Marching shall raise the battle-marshalled spear ;  
 For I myself then lying in my tomb,  
 Will make their march, if they transgress this oath,  
 By irresistible calamities  
 Dark with despair, their voyaging accurst, 770  
 So that they shall repent them of their toil.  
 If mine oath rest inviolate, I will be  
 All-gracious to them while they honour aye  
 This burg of Pallas with confederate spear.  
 Farewell : mayst thou and these that ward thy walls,  
 Grappling with foes, find none to 'scape your might,  
 Your conquering spear whereon deliverance rides.

[Exit with Apollo.]

## CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

Upstart Gods, ye have downriden  
 Olden laws, have left mine hand  
 Void! Oh misery!—I am bidden 780  
 Yield mine honours! This your land  
 Under my wrath lies banned :

I avenge my grief by casting  
 Venom-spray thereon, the spume  
 Frothing from mine heart, and blasting  
 Tree disleafed and barren womb.  
 The crushed land's canker-doom—  
 Ho for Justice!—lo, is raining  
 Ruin-drops on grass and corn!  
 What should I do else?—tamely plaining  
 Bear mocks?—not visit their disdainings 790  
 On this people? Ah forlorn  
 Daughters whom Night hath borne,  
 Now things of scorn!

## ATHENA.

Give heed to me: groan not so heavily.  
 Ye are not vanquished. Nay, by equal votes  
 Fairly was sentence passed. Ye are not slighted.  
 Nay, but from Zeus clear testimony came—  
 And who revealed it, also testified—  
 'Of this deed let Orestes take no hurt.'  
 Therefore let not your anger's lightning smite 800  
 This land, nor nurse ye wrath, nor blast the fruits  
 Thereof by down-dropt gout of demon-spite—  
 Relentless darts devouring seeds of life.  
 For here in utter faith I promise you  
 Shrines, sanctuary-crypts in a just land—  
 Where by your hearths shall ye sit splendour-  
 throned,—  
 To have and hold, aye honoured by my folk.

## CHORUS.

(Ant. 1)

Upstart Gods, ye have downriden  
 Olden laws, have left mine hand

Void! Oh misery!—I am bidden 810  
 Yield mine honours! This your land  
 Under my wrath lies banned :  
 I avenge my grief by casting  
 Venom-spray thereon, the spume  
 Frothing from mine heart, and blasting  
 Tree disleafed and barren womb.  
 The crushed land's canker-doom—  
 Ho for Justice!—lo, is raining  
 Ruin-drops on grass and corn!  
 What should I do else?—tamely plaining  
 Bear mocks?—not visit their disdaining 820  
 On this people? Ah forlorn  
 Daughters whom Night hath borne,  
 Now things of scorn!

## ATHENA.

Ye are not dishonoured. Do not in fell wrath,  
 Goddesses, smite past healing mortals' land.  
 I too in Zeus trust,—yet why speak hereof?—  
 And know, alone of Gods, the keys that ward  
 The chamber where his thunderbolts are sealed :—  
 Nay, but such arms I need not! Swayed by me,  
 Cast not the fruitage of a froward tongue 830  
 Earthward, to blast all increase of the land.  
 Lull thou this storm-black billow's bitter rage  
 As one with me that dwells, with awe revered.  
 When thine the firstfruits are of sacrifice  
 For babes and wedlock-rites through this wide land  
 For ever, this my counsel shall ye praise.

## CHORUS.

(Str. 2)

O that I thus should be dealt with!—'neath earth to  
 be banished, be banished!

I, with the wisdom of old who am dowered, shall I  
 dwell with you, I,  
 Held a pollution, an outcast whose honour hath  
 vanished, hath vanished ?  
 Nay, but I breathe out all fury, all wrath—Earth,  
 hearken my cry ! 840  
 Ah for the thrill of the pang through mine heart that  
 is stinging, is stinging !  
 Bow down thine ear to the cry of mine anger, my  
 mother, O Night !  
 Cunning resistless of Gods from my grasp hath been  
 wringing—yea, wringing  
 As from a thing of nought—mine immemorial right !

## ATHENA.

Still with thy wrath I bear—the elder thou,  
 And wiser far than I in manifold lore :  
 Yet prudent wit to me too Zeus hath given. 850  
 Now if to an alien land ye hence depart,  
 For my land shall ye pine ; this I foretell.  
 The forward-flowing tide of time shall be  
 Richer in blessing to my folk ; and thou,  
 Enthroned in honour mid Erechtheus' homes,  
 Shalt win such homage from his sons and daughters  
 As never shalt thou have of other men.<sup>1</sup> 857  
 Such blessings from mine hand thou mayest choose,  
 Doing, receiving good, with honour high [867  
 My partner in this god-beloved land.

CHORUS. (*Ant. 2*)

O that I thus should be dealt with !—'neath earth to  
 be banished, be banished ! 870

1. Weil's transference of the next nine lines to follow l. 912  
 is here adopted.

I, with the wisdom of old who am dowered, shall I  
 dwell with you, I,  
 Held a pollution, an outcast whose honour hath  
 vanished, hath vanished?  
 Nay, but I breathe out all fury, all wrath—Earth,  
 hearken my cry!  
 Ah for the thrill of the pang through mine heart that  
 is stinging, is stinging!  
 Bow down thine ear to the cry of mine anger, my  
 mother, O Night!  
 Cunning resistless of Gods from my grasp hath been  
 wringing—yea, wringing [880  
 As from a thing of nought—mine immemorial right!

## ATHENA.

I will not weary of fair speech to thee.  
 Ne'er shalt thou say that thou, the elder god,  
 By me, the younger, and by Athens' folk  
 Wast driven dishonoured forth to banishment.  
 If holy thou account the majesty  
 Of Suasion, and the peace-spell of my tongue,  
 O then remain. If thou wilt not remain,  
 Wrongfully shalt thou hurl against my town  
 Wrath, rancorous spite, or scathe unto her sons.  
 Lo, thine it is to hold this land in fee 890  
 By lawful right in honour evermore.

## CHORUS.

Athena, Queen, thou tell'st me of a home?—

## ATHENA.

Unvexed of all annoy. Accept thou this.

## CHORUS.

Grant I accept—what honour waiteth me?

ATHENA.

That no house shall without thy blessing thrive.

CHORUS.

Wilt thou make sure that I shall have such power ?

ATHENA.

Yea, I will prosper such as reverence thee.

CHORUS.

Wilt thou for all time plight thy troth hereto ?

ATHENA.

What I will not fulfil I need not say.

CHORUS.

Meseems thy words bring balm—mine anger dies. 900

ATHENA.

Dwell in the land, and thou shalt get thee friends.

CHORUS.

What hymn wouldst thou that I chant o'er the land ?

ATHENA.

A hymn that hails a glorious victory's dawn,  
A hymn of boons from earth, from ocean's dew,  
From heaven, invoking breathings of the winds  
To waft the sun-gold as they pace the land ;  
A hymn of earth's increase, of flocks and herds  
Abounding, failing never with the years,  
A hymn of babes in kindly travail born.  
But be thou strict to root the impious out, 910  
Our weeds—for as a gardener cherish I  
And shield from sorrow's blight the righteous race.



[Hurl thou not o'er my land the seeds of strife, 858  
 Whetstones of blood, whereof brave hearts are pierced  
 Frenzied with passion kindled not with wine.  
 Nor, plucking forth the fierce cock's fiery heart,  
 In my folk plant it, kindling civic broil  
 Of brothers against brothers ranged defiant.  
 Be their wars all with aliens—wars enow  
 For hearts wherein stern lust of glory burns!—  
 But of the home-bird's bickerings will I none.] 866  
 Such boons be thine : but in the glorious strife  
 Of war, myself will suffer not this town  
 To be uncrowned with victory midst the nations.

## CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

I accept : for mine home no more I refuse  
     Queen Pallas's dwelling.  
 I will wrong not the city which most high Zeus  
     And the War-god, excelling  
 In strength, have accounted their fortress-town ;  
     For she, to deliver  
 Gods' altars from spoilers shall battle, their crown  
     Of rejoicing for ever. 920  
 I call down blessing on her in this hour,  
     In love foretelling  
 How the sun with his quickening splendour shall  
     shower  
 Wealth on her, life's fullest bliss for her dower  
     As a fountain upwelling.

## ATHENA.

All this hath my love's zeal done  
 For my people : a home have I given  
 In their midst to the Mighty Ones hard to be won,

Yea, to them from whose lordship exempted is none  
Of mortals under the heaven. [930

Who hath felt not their power knoweth not  
Whence calamity comes in his lot.

Him sins long past in their chains bind fast,  
And hale him their bar before ;  
And by silent Death is his clamorous breath  
Stilled evermore.

CHORUS. (Ant. 1)

O the boons that I chant, they are mine to bestow !  
No blight breathe, flinging  
Death-dews on the trees, nor the sun's fierce glow  
Shrivel buds at their springing 940  
Or ever they break from the cradle-sheath  
Of their wintertide-sleeping.  
No rust touch the corn with its cancerous teeth  
Like a serpent on-creeping.  
By the bounty of Pan twin lambs let the ewe  
Ever bear, as on-winging  
The hours lead hither the year born anew :  
So thy land of its treasure-trove yearly their due  
To the Gods shall be bringing.

ATHENA.

Ho, warders of my wall,  
Hear ye their blessings ?—all  
These surely shall befall ; 950  
For all-prevailing  
The mighty Erinnys is  
With Gods aye throned in bliss,  
With Dwellers in the Abyss.  
Clear-seen, unfailing,

Man's cup of doom they brim ;  
And some lives one glad hymn  
Make they, some misty-dim  
With tears of wailing.

CHORUS.

(*Str. 2*)

And I ban the arrow that darkling flieth,  
Whereby man dieth  
Before his hour.  
Unto sweet maids ope ye the new life's portals  
Of love, Immortals  
Who hold this power. 960  
O Fates, our sisters, O strict dividers  
Of doom, abiders  
In every home  
With hands aye heavy in just visitations,  
By all earth's nations  
Most revered, come !

ATHENA.

Glad am I for my land  
Thus dowered with gracious hand.  
I bless the soft eyes' pleading 970  
Of Suasion : when, not heeding  
Mine own lips' interceding,  
These raged, she spake through me.  
'Twas Zeus the Counsel-lord  
Gained us that great award.  
Henceforth in rivalry  
Of good deeds we contending  
Shall both, through years unending  
Win victory.

CHORUS.

(Ant. 2)

And faction, hungry for mischief ever,  
     In your streets never  
     Resound her yell;  
 Nor may burghers' blood from the red dust crying, 980  
     With murders replying  
     To murders, swell  
 The tale of curses; but love delighting  
     In love-requiting  
     Be theirs: one will  
 In cherishing friends, against foemen steeling  
     Their hearts—here is healing  
     For many an ill.

ATHENA.

Lo, wisdom in the hearts of these;  
     Their tongues the law of kindness learn.  
 Great gain from these dread Presences 990  
     For this my people I discern.  
 These love you now; O love them ye;  
     Honour ye them exceedingly:  
 So all your lives shall be with glory crowned—  
 A land, a state, for righteousness renowned.

CHORUS.

(Str. 3)

Blessèd be ye in your goodly heritage, burgher-nation!  
     Blessèd be ye, who are homed so nigh unto Zeus,  
     who are dear  
 To the Maiden beloved, with her wisdom are dowered,  
     to whose habitation 1000  
     'Neath the wings of Pallas, the bolts of Allfather  
     come not near.

## ATHENA.

Blessèd be ye withal !  
 Now must I pass before, to lead you  
     On to your shrine-crypt's hall.  
 Lo where the sacred lamps precede you  
 High-borne by your attendant-train.  
 By blood of hallowed victims slain  
 On-ushered pass ye underground.  
     Thence send ye influences benign,  
     That victory's star on these may shine :  
     Each influence to my land malign  
     Be there fast bound.  
 Lead, warders of my city-home,                   1010  
 Ye sons of Kranaus, these who come  
 To sojourn with you. In my folk  
 Aye may their gracious acts provoke  
     Love : be your hearts their shrine !

CHORUS. *(Ant. 3)*

Blessèd be ye, twice-blessèd, all ye in the city abiding,  
     O ye Immortals and mortals, who dwell within  
     Pallas's wall !  
 While ye shall revere me, your fellow-abider, no cause  
     for chiding  
 Of the lot of your life shall ye find, what chance  
     soever befall.                                   1020

## ATHENA.

All praise to these your invocation-vows !  
 With light of splendour-bearing brands will I  
 Escort you to your deep haunts 'neath the earth,  
 I and mine handmaids, who with reverence ward  
 My sacred image. Of all Theseus' land

Now shall the flower go forth, a glorious troop  
 Of boys, of women, and of matrons old.  
 With crimson vesture's bravery honour ye  
 These. Let the leaping flames set forward now,  
 That these, our land's great visitants, may show 1030  
 Their grace henceforth in fair prosperity.

*The procession of women and children, headed by  
 Athena and the Eumenides, moves forward.*

CHANT OF THE ESCORT-PROCESSION. (Str. 1)

Pass to your homes, O Mighty Ones, of honour jealous  
 ever,  
 Sprung from Night's womb, lone Powers, of whom  
 shall spring like issue never ;  
 Led on by this adoring train—  
*O dwellers in the land, refrain from speech : this hush  
 is holy !—*

(Ant. 1)

Pass to the immemorial caves, hid under earth dark-  
 veiling :  
 There upon you with honours due, with sacrifice  
 unfailing,  
 Shall we in deepest reverence call.  
*Break silence not, ye people all ; from speech refrain  
 you wholly !*

*The procession reaches the entrance to the Cave of  
 the Furies, which is beneath the Areopagus.*

(Str. 2)

Come hither, Queens of Worship, come, henceforth  
 on Athens turning 1040

A kindly face, with heart of grace to usward stead-  
fast-yearning.

Lo here your path ; pace down the same

Glad, lit by brand-devouring flame.

*Raise, all ye people, now the acclaim of holy song far-  
ringing !*

(*Ant. 2*)

Within yon halls, by gleaming torches lit, the peace-  
oblation

Shall aye be poured. The all-seeing lord, even Zeus,  
for Pallas' nation

To bring the new fair age to birth,

With Fate allied, hath stooped to earth !

*Ring out, all folk, the voice of mirth, the strain of  
holy singing !*

*The procession of women and children passes on  
down the streets of the city.*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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